



The Croxley Green RESIDENT

Published by
**CROXLEY GREEN RESIDENTS'
ASSOCIATION**

Editor: John Hedges
Assisted by: Molly Hedges

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All sponsored parish councillors are ex-officio members, they are:-

Michael Johns, Hazel Seeley & Adrian Simpson

Material published in this newsletter does not necessarily represent the views of the Association nor its committee.

The Committee meets approximately six times a year and all meetings are open to the public. It is represented on many other local committees where it can make its voice heard and can bring back valuable information .

Please send advertisements to:-

Rosemary Hanscomb
22 Dickinson Avenue - 449945
and letters and contributions to:-
John Hedges

44 Ludlow Way - 222715
by September 1st 2002 if possible.

Articles from local groups and societies are especially welcome but remember next publishing date is October.

CROXLEY GREEN RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

at
METHODIST CHURCH HALL
on

**Tuesday 19th March 2002
at 8.00 pm**

**Edna Jeffries will present an
illustrated talk on**

**A Walk through the Jordan Desert
WADIRAM to PETRA**

This walk was in support of the Teenage
Cancer Trust

Please come and air your views

EDITORIAL

This edition has taken longer to put together than usual. Perhaps it's the weather, for there is no doubt that the gloomy changeable weather we have experienced early this year can depress all of us.

However, I hope that this edition will do much to lift us out of our SAD condition and show us what good we have all around us.

It is pleasing to have articles from local groups and societies telling us about them, we have so many that many are un-remarked whilst they do so much to enrich the life of our community. Without these groups we would all be the poorer.

Which brings me to a special concern of my own and, I hope, to the whole community. The **Revels on the Green** are probably the highlight of the year for the people of Croxley Green but they do not take place without the hard work of many volunteers. Over the years the personnel involved have changed, mainly through age, and appeals through these columns have borne fruit.

Once again, we are in need and this means you - don't leave it to others. See our appeals in this edition and respond now. I can assure you that it is very worthwhile as so many benefit not least, our local societies and I've just set out how important they are.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

This year started for me with the sad loss of Polly Burdis. Polly was so well loved in Croxley Green and was part of the Association for over 20 years, much of this time looking after the subscriptions. Many residents attended her service on Wednesday 9th January, so many that they spilled out of the Chapel. On a personal note I would like to express my thanks to her husband Ernest who invited us to join the family on this occasion. Although I had not seen Polly for some time, my own memories are of her quiet voice and the attentive manner in which she made you feel at ease. She was a wonderful producer of large mugs of tea and delicious home made cake that just appeared. We have in this community a wealth of people like Polly, who have given their time to the association. Not everyone is on the committee, but works as it were, behind the scenes. I have been asked by the committee to extend our thanks to Mrs E Human, 37 Lewes Way who has been assisting the Association with collecting the subscriptions for over 30 years as well as delivering the Resident. She feels it's time to hang up her walking shoes and will be retiring from this task. Another long-serving distributor who has had to lay down the task was Mr Hunt of Sherborne Way. On behalf of the committee and the community ~ Thank you. both.

Tuesday 19th March ~ Methodist Church, Small Hall, New Road. The Annual General Meeting will be upon us and you are invited to attend. This is a relatively short meeting but an opportunity to raise any issues you may feel we can help you with. There is usually a speaker to follow and she is advertised on this page.

During the year 2001, Croxley Green Parish Council has been prominent and well publicised in the local paper. As you are aware this Association has sponsored many Parish Councillors. Copy for this edition is required before the Extra-ordinary meeting called on 16th January regarding the Tribunal that was held in October 2001. Any decision arising is awaited ~ lets hope a new administration will sow the seeds of a council that offers best value and best practise in maintaining and improving the environment of Croxley Green.

Margaret J Pomfret

The Churches in Croxley Green warmly invite you to share in our Sunday worship:

The Baptist Church, Baldwins Lane
 9.15 am Morning Worship
 11.00 am Family Service
 6.30 pm Evening Worship
 Revd David Walker - 231403
 Associate Minister: Steve Moody - 244029

St Bede's (RC), Baldwins Lane
 Saturday 6.00 pm Vigil Mass
 Sunday 10.00 am Mass
 6.00 pm Mass
 Father Philip Cross - 231969

The Methodist Church, New Road
 10.30 am Morning Worship
 with creche/Junior Church
 6.30 pm Evening Service
 Revd César A Guidi - 774011
 Bookings John Rowe - 234920

All Saints (C of E), The Green
 8.00 am Holy Communion
 9.40 am Junior Church (Except 3rd Sunday)
 9.45 am Parish Eucharist
 11.30 am Family Service (3rd Sunday in month)
 2.00 pm Baptism (2nd & 4th Sunday)
 6.00 pm Evensong
 Revd Luke Lee - 772109



St Oswald's (C of E), Malvern Way
 8.00 am Holy Communion
 10.00 am Family Service (1st Sunday in month)
 Family Eucharist & children's groups (on other Sundays)
 Evening services as advertised
 Revd Anne Lovegrove - 232387

Pauline (Polly) Burdis

20 January 1932 - 31 December 2001

Polly Burdis was a dear friend to everyone who was privileged to know her. We, as a Residents' Association, were very pleased to honour the many years service that she gave, through us, to the people of Croxley Green by making her a Vice-President of the Association. This is an honour not given to many except for those whose contribution to the Association has been outstanding.

Her Funeral Service was held at North Watford Cemetery on Wednesday 9 January. The Chapel could not contain all who wished to pay tribute and late-comers overflowed into the porch. I am at a loss to know what to write about her but have obtained Ernest's permission to reprint the tribute that he made to his beloved wife in the Order of Service:-

**Pauline (Polly) Burdis
 Her life and times in brief**

Polly was born in 1932, the eldest of 4 children born to George and Doris Evans in the Paddington District of London. Derek, Yvonne and Christopher followed.

The family moved to the new L.C.C. Estate in South Oxhey in about 1950. Polly was evacuated during the Second World War, to Cornwall with brother Derek. She contracted tuberculosis in her teens and overcame the removal of part of a lung. It was this determination and spirit which took her through life and the set backs she suffered through constant problems of ill health.

I met Polly in 1955 when we both worked for the Eastern Gas Board in their Clarendon Road, Watford, offices. We married in 1956 at St. Joseph's R.C. church in South Oxhey and loved and cared for each other for 45 years. Against heavy odds, Polly produced our 2 lovely children, Ann in 1961 and Dominic in 1972; both born in Watford. Thankfully, in spite of Polly having to stop work early in 1957, we had saved enough to put down a deposit on a terraced house in Westbury Road, near to the football ground. In that year, the cost of the house was £1,875; hard to believe by today's prices!

After 8 happy years, including the birth of Ann, we moved to Basildon New Town where I extended my personnel career. Other job moves followed in Essex and Hartlepool, (1968-1971) and then we returned to Watford. We moved to our present home in Croxley Green in January 1976, Polly cheerfully and willingly supported me in all our moves and consequent traumas, even though she had never previously been north of Watford in her life!

It was whilst we were in Watford in the early 1960s that Polly joined the Samaritans. She also helped set up and run a new branch of the Sams during our time in Hartlepool. After a break, she rejoined the Samaritans as a volunteer and thoroughly enjoyed the much valued support and friendship from other volunteers at South West Herts Sams in Watford.

It was her work with the Samaritans and Croxley Green Residents' Association that reflected Polly's unselfish, calm and kind character in caring for, and sharing, in the needs of others.

I always felt fully supported, encouraged and loved, in spite of my selfish ambitions across career, sports and other active pursuits and interests.

Polly and I enjoyed 3 very happy summers in our caravan in Suffolk, near Southwold. We particularly loved strolling along together on the promenade at the seaside. We planned to move somewhere near, this year, but somehow, I sensed it was not to happen.

Polly loved our old Victorian garden, which provided her with places for rest and tranquillity as well as endless pleasure in watching and helping nature unfold her many treasures.

She will always be sitting at the end of the garden, mug of tea in hand and cat on lap in thoughtful repose. I shall continue to join her from time to time and share some thoughts and plans.

Polly was a super mother and grandmother. I know our granddaughters, Harriet and Clemency loved her dearly. Her brothers, Derek and Chris, and sister Yvonne were always especially in her thoughts.

We will always greatly miss Polly and pray that God will take special care of her, she will be in our thoughts and prayers and always loved.

Thank you for loving Polly and God bless you all.

Ernest.

The love and thoughts of us all are extended to Ernest and his family at this time and, not least, our thanks for the many blessings brought to us by his devoted wife.

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Croxley Green Archaeology

I'm grateful to the editor for this opportunity to say something about the effort to focus attention on the archaeology of Croxley Green and, more importantly, ask some questions of residents which could help research.

The aims of the planned group are to:-

1. Arrange meetings on matters of active archaeological interest.
2. Carry out archaeological investigations locally.
3. Arrange visits to "working" sites and local places of archaeological interest.
4. Bring together and build a clear public record of the archaeology of Croxley Green, documenting & photographing associated "finds" - flint tools, stone hand axes, arrowheads etc. etc..

Palaeolithic (stone age) evidence was unearthed and identified here as early as 1904, residents can assist by advising of any archaeological information they may know of, gleaned over the years, perhaps from others, particularly relating to finds such as pieces of old pottery, old coins, clay pipes, bits of red roof tiles, odd brickwork, carved stone, whilst occasionally excavating in garden areas etc. for ponds, patios or landscaping. Anyone who has knowledge of old maps can help, as such maps taken together can reveal how the landscape has been used and changed over time. Similarly, aerial photos can reveal outlines of ancient boundaries, ditches and structures or other possible archaeological anomalies, old shots no less than modern.

I recently heard from Len Leach (now 89) who left the area in 1975, having lived in Kenilworth Drive, and who did much archaeological work in West Herts over many years and discovered some of the early local "finds".

The Three Rivers planning officer tells me that no matter of an archaeological interest has been brought to his attention in Croxley Green in the past seven years. **If you don't look, you can't find - it's up to us to look.** A site at the confluence of three rivers would have been an attractive location from the earliest times (and still is) as evidence of early settlements further on in the Chess and Gade valleys has shown.

A further series of meetings has been arranged, the main aim being to attract those interested in active archaeology, though all are welcome, out of which a constitution, formal membership and a managing committee can then be formed.

Dates for your diary:

March 25

"Investigations into the earliest origins and spread of agriculture: recent excavations in Central Asia"

Professor David Harris.

April 29

"The decline and fall of Roman Britain"

Dr Neil Faulkner.

Issue editor of *Current Archaeology* will talk about his recent book.

May 13

"The Archaeology of Roman Hertfordshire"

Dr Rosalind Niblett

will update and review developments since her original book was published.

*All talks commence at 8.00 pm
and will be held in
Croxley Green Library.*

In the best tradition of the Residents' Association all the speakers have local connections or are resident!

For further information please contact:-
David Harding on 01923 779284,
(e-mail: drh@the-hardings.org) or

CROXLEY NEEDLECRAFTERS

From humble beginnings in 1998, Croxley Needlecrafters has grown to number more than 30 stitchers who meet to exchange ideas and patterns, learn new skills and enjoy a few hours a month of dedicated stitching time. In addition to our own projects, quilting, cross stitch, embroidery, tapestry, etc.... we are currently working on a group project, a wallhanging showing aspects of Croxley Green depicted using a variety of stitching mediums which, when completed, will go on permanent public display. Occasionally we invite speakers and hold workshops to further our knowledge of stitching techniques and we also have a close association with a specialist stitching shop, Crossover Crafts of Hemel Hempstead. We are always very happy to welcome new members to the group so bring your stitching along and join us.

The Needlecrafters meet at 8 pm on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month, (except national holidays) at The Shed at The Sportsman, Scots Hill, Croxley Green. £1.50 per meeting including refreshments. Contact Stella on 01923 442637 or Sue on 01923 441397 for further details.

Look out for a display of our work in Croxley Green Library in June!

CROXLEY GREEN SOCIETY

Our current Chairman and Secretary will be standing down this year and replacements are urgently needed. As we are the parent body of the Revels Organising Committee this need is very urgent.

Please contact:-
John Hedges on 01923 222715

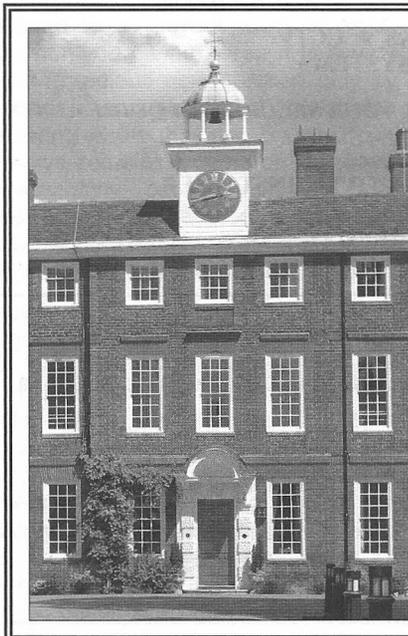
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The Health Service in Decline? 16th to 25th July 2001

This is not a definitive discourse on the Health Service but a series of impressions that I formed during my recent stay in Watford General Hospital for ten days. This is one of the so-called *dirty* Hospitals, I did not judge as those that treated me did not judge, but gave of their expertise to send me out marvelling at their sheer Professionalism at all times.

Footsteps - Measured - draw nearer - they stop by my bed, a torch flashes on then off again, and the footsteps recede.

Where the hell am I? Slowly memory returns and I remember that this is the twilight world of coughing and calls for Mum or Dad.

Welcome to a surgical ward at night, and when you cannot sleep it is a very long and tedious night, broken only by the snores and moans of those also wondering where they are. By day there is *always* something going on to relieve the monotony, but at night the poor souls who have been to surgery are finally surfacing as the anaesthetic wears off.

A hospital today is absolutely stuffed to the gunwhales with people, which I liken to a large anthill. The worker ants are the Nursing staff - bless them. The whole thing would soon come unravelled without them. Nurses and Doctors these days come from the four corners of the earth, as do most of the ancillary staff, nothing seems beyond their capabilities even though some of the nurses are of quite diminutive in stature. Jokes are often misinterpreted

but then we Brits have a funny sense of humour anyway.

The car parks come alive quite early in the mornings, plus there are often not enough car spaces to go round leading to some fun and games as the spaces to park get scarcer. Some wards overlook this daily activity giving rise to the thought that this is entertainment at its cheapest!! It must be purgatory for people with appointments to visit specialists etc. as the appointed time gets nearer and there is nowhere to park. The barriers raise temptingly even if there are no spaces available, due entirely to cars badly parked, I guess by people panicking as their appointment time gets nearer? We did not actually witness any car park rage ---but in the future?

Slowly the noise softens as midnight approaches with a lull giving one time for forty winks, then woken again by some poor soul retching his heart up, sometimes even those with an iron constitution feel queasy in sympathy.

Then light through the curtains, dawn at last; we made it through another long - long - night.

As fast as beds empty they fill again in this constant quest to catch up with the long lists of people awaiting hospitalisation, illnesses as opposed to surgery must make a mess of the hospitals plans to operate and shorten the lists for treatment. The only answer would be to shoot people when they get sick, as long as it's not me - O K - but we would all say that wouldn't we!!

Accident & Emergency are constantly stretched to the limit, as road accidents constantly arrive, I arrived with a letter from my G.P. saying that my case was urgent but I still waited for eight hours in A and E!!

The staff looked absolutely worn out, how the poor doctors make sound judgements seems almost miraculous to me, it all seems to be a *patch and hold* operation to my layman's eyes. The nurses have some modern aids to assist them in the form of automatic machines to measure blood pressure and pulse, and they are used to monitor patients coming to, after a visit to the operating theatre. Any questions are answered straight away, so there is no need to feel that as a patient you will be in the dark concerning one's medical condition, surprisingly it concentrates the mind wonderfully when you are in the *frame medically*!! Mind you being called *Sir* took a bit of getting used to, us ex-army chaps are used to calling other persons *Sir*!

Luckily for me my condition, while dangerous was I hope not life threatening, but I never got the impression that I was ever on the back burner so to speak treatment-wise. Inevitably there will be moans from disgruntled patients, *angry of Tunbridge*

Wells seems to be everywhere these days, and assertion classes have a lot to answer for.

On the day of my admission it seems that there was a lot of fiddling with numbers to get me a bed, but by the second week of my 'holiday' spaces began to appear as if the tide had turned and was now going out.

There is an opinion amongst Hospital staff that when the weather is good then there are fewer admissions, so I wonder what do people do about their illnesses when the sun shines?

People had road traffic accidents at intervals all day that my Wife and I waited in Accident and Emergency, the Watford ring-road Grand Prix being well known hereabouts, and it takes place every working day!! When somebody carried in a child covered in blood my problems seemed insignificant as the staff gave reassurance to the parents all the while surrounded by at least fifty of us waiting. At no time did I expect to find a ward looking like a room in the Dorchester Hotel or my food to be cooked by any of the Master chefs, all was adequate for my needs which were attended to while answering my sometimes silly questions!

John of Croxley.

REVELS ON THE GREEN

We badly need new blood having lost a number of key people in the last two years. At our last meeting we recruited one new member but still more are needed if the Revels is to continue. Most of us have already passed our sell-by date.

If you have the will - we will find a way.

Please contact:-

John Hedges on 01923 222715

CROXLEY GREEN FLOWER GROUP

The Croxley Green Flower Group was formed in 1965 by Miss Kay Raggett, who sadly died in December 2000. Today we are still holding our Monthly Demonstrations at the Red Cross Centre in Barton Way.. Why not come along to one of our meetings. Our demonstrators are NAFF trained to Area and National grades. Our group evenings are held on the second Tuesday of each month, except for August. Group evenings commence at 7.45 pm. We have an interval half way through the evening when tea and coffee are served and we can enjoy chatting with all of our friends.

Please come along, a warm welcome awaits you. Our invitation is extended to anyone interested in improving their skills with flowers or to anyone who just likes a relaxing evening.

Mrs Vera McDonald (Chairman).

LIBRARY COLUMN

As I've only just returned to work following a 3 month break after my second hip replacement operation, I thought I'd let you know what I've enjoyed reading during my enforced absence.

In **Acid Row** by Minette Walters a child is reported missing on a rundown housing estate where paedophiles have been rehoused. An angry mob gathers and a young doctor is caught up in the siege. I raced through this disturbing but gripping novel.

The Fatal Voyage by Kathy Reichs is her fourth novel featuring forensic anthropologist Tempe Brennan and deals with the investigation following a plane crash. If you enjoy Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series you'll enjoy this novel too.

A suspicious disappearance triggers off the events in Robert Goddard's **Dying to Kill**. Like all Goddard's novels it's full of twists and turns and is a real page-turner.

Why would someone who survived a tragic rail crash walk away and let her family believe that she died in the wreckage? Like me, you'll have to read **The Nature of the Beast** by Frances Fyfield to find out!

In **Miss Garnet's Angel** by Salley Vickers, a retired English schoolteacher wintering in Venice becomes fascinated by the story of Tobias and the Angel. This novel has deservedly grown in popularity by word of mouth recommendation.

The date is AD75. In Lindsey Davis' latest novel **The Body in the Bathhouse**, Roman private eye Marcus Didius Falco is sent to Britain to sort out the builders at Fishbourne Palace. As usual, wherever Falco goes murder can't be far behind!

Ruth Rendell's latest offering, **Adam and Eve and Pinch Me**, is the tale of a handsome con man who preys on a succession of women until he gets his come-uppance.

I finally found time to read Margaret Atwood's novel **The Blind Assassin**, winner of the Booker Prize in 2000. Unlike some of the previous winning novels, this was very readable!

When I felt like a break from fiction I read **Bad Blood**, the autobiography of the late Lorna Sage and Carol Drinkwater's **The Olive Farm**, which is described on the cover as "A memoir of life, love and olive oil in the south of France". The book describes how writer and actress Carol Drinkwater (best known as Christopher Timothy's wife in the TV series "All Creatures Great and Small") and her partner Michel bought an abandoned olive farm in Provence and gradually restored it to the production of olive oil. It was the perfect book to cheer me up as the weather here got colder.

Finally, I just found time to read **The Last Time They Met** by Anita Shreve before I started back at work in early January. She is another writer who has gained popularity by personal recommendation and I've now bought myself a copy of one of her earlier novels, **The Pilot's Wife**, and can't wait to start reading it.

Now that I'm back at work my rate of reading will slow down drastically but it's good to be back.

Sue Durham, Librarian



Do specialised diets work??

Today there are a multitude of diets out on the market to treat a whole variety of conditions in cats and dogs. For example there are diets for dissolving stones in the bladder of your cat or dog. We even have a low salt diet for dogs with heart failure to name but a few.

A lot of these diets have been based on what we know is wrong with the animal when they are sick with that condition and the diet tries to reverse these effects. For example, we know cats and dogs with renal failure have high blood urea levels. One of the aims of the kidney diets is to lower these blood urea levels by feeding the animal less protein. The diet may also be designed based on our knowledge about how the condition comes about. For example we know exactly what makes up some of the stones found in the bladder. By feeding a diet low in these components the stones will not form.

However the question was do these diets actually work? Well the short answer to this is yes.

For my example here I will discuss diets designed for cats and dogs that have kidney failure. These diets have been around for many years. In fact they were the first diet designed by the founder of Hills, Mark Morris, some 50 years ago. Owners and vets have all noticed how their pets have benefited from this type of diet. But in the last year there has been some actual clinical studies into the efficacy of these diets. One of these was done by a veterinary surgeon at the Royal Veterinary College. The trial basically consisted of two groups of cats that had early stage kidney failure. Group 1 consisted of cats who ate the special kidney diet only. Group 2 consisted either of cats that did not eat the food or whose owners would not feed the food to their cat. They measured how effective these diets were by seeing how long the cats lived on their respective diets. The cats in Group 1 survived for, on average, in excess of 2 more years, while most of the cats in Group 2 lived for only another year on average. This is an obvious and significant difference. This sort of work shows conclusively that these diets are beneficial for your pet and can make all the difference.

The good news as well is that several companies are now in the prescription diet business, not just Hills. This means that we can often find a diet for your cat should they not be tempted by their new special diet. These companies are at the same time always looking at palatability because the diet is absolutely useless if your pet will not eat it. "Pedigree" Petfood is soon to be bringing out their prescription cat diets in sachet form to address this issue with our fussy feline friends. So hopefully now we will no longer have to give up and resign ourselves to the cat eating good old chicken when we have something a lot better on offer.

Robert Bird - Veterinary Surgeon.

REVELS ON THE GREEN

Saturday 22 June 2002

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John Hedges on 01923 222715

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Anyone wishing to book a car-boot space should call Kay on 01923 337294 or Deborah on 01923 244652 or look in the local press for further details in late April and early May.

REVELS ON THE GREEN

Saturday 22nd June 2002

All enquiries for stalls and floats
to John Hedges
01923 222715

A world-wide variety show

I am writing this article on a cold December morning. It is crisp, clear, and a good day for some typical winter birding. Others may prefer to stay indoors and watch TV, or perhaps go to the theatre to see a traditional winter pantomime. But the variety and the colour of the bird life around Croxley Green at this time of year is as brilliant as any pantomime, and each of the birds in our gardens has its own particular role to play, just like the characters on the stage.

One of the most obvious characters - possibly the 'star' of the show - must be the *robin*. This is perhaps Britain's most popular bird, recognised and loved by most garden bird watchers, and of course is also seen indoors at Christmas, on millions of Christmas cards. Never shy birds, this is nonetheless the time of the year when they become even more obvious, and less aggressive. It's preferred food of worms and grubs is difficult to find in frozen ground and so two or three robins may share a good territory - something they would never do later in the season - in order to make best use of the food available. By spring time, the robin will once again be a very territorial bird, defending his own patch against all aggression from rival males. But for the present, the robin is very friendly and visible and so must be the Prince Charming of our pantomime, strong, colourful, and confident.

But who is to be the princess? The dainty *blue tit* is a good candidate, with attractive colouring, a lively behaviour, and an acrobatic ability which is as useful on a peanut feeder as on a twiggy trapeze. Blue tits are common in our gardens throughout the year. The tits share resources much more than robins, and different family groups will all take turns on the feeders. Blue tits often use artificial nest boxes, and during the early springtime they can be seen busily feeding their young with caterpillars and grubs.

The chorus and the corps-de-ballet are made up from two of the smaller birds which visit our gardens, from very different bird families. The *goldfinch* is perhaps one of our most colourful little birds, with a costume of black and gold, and a striking red head-dress. It also has a distinctive call and song, and whilst its preferred food is the teasel seed it will come to garden feeders if a substitute (the *niger* seed) is made available. The goldfinch is as much at home on the ground - picking up discarded seeds - as it is on special feeders where its delicate bill can pick out the individual niger seeds through tiny feeding holes. In contrast, the *long-tailed tit* appears at first glance to be a sombre black and white bird, but closer inspection reveals the softest powder blue and pink tones to its plumage. Long-tailed tits are usually seen in family parties of up to two dozen birds, and like any well-drilled ballet team they follow each other across the garden stage, from tree to tree, calling as they go, in a musical game of follow-my-leader.

Pantomimes also demand a villain, and for many people the *magpie* is perfectly cast in this role. The magpie tends to 'get bad reviews' but it is perhaps wrongly identified as a scoundrel of the garden. The growth in its numbers is a consequence of its success in adapting to an urban life style, and its ability to eat anything from cornflake crumbs to the scraps from the Christmas turkey. The more specialised feeders - thrushes and so on - are less able to adapt and so their numbers have declined irrespective of the effects of predatory magpies. And it must be acknowledged that the magpie is a handsome bird, with bold black and white plumage, an aggressive manner, and a size which makes it stand out amongst the other garden birds. He may take the role of the bad baron, but his defence would be that it's all the fault of his upbringing.

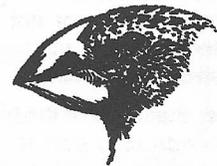
We could go on with the pantomimic analogy - *starlings* as brokers men, *collared doves* for the peripheral loving pair, and so on, - but it is time now to consider why these various birds are so different in appearance and behaviour. Why does a robin defend a private territory and eat worms, whilst blue tits congregate in larger numbers and take

peanuts from a wire cage? To find the answers we move from the cold of Croxley Green in winter to the warmth of the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean, just south of the Equator. Yes it's now the Grand Transformation Scene!

As the curtain rises over these volcanic rocks we see lots of small sparrow-like birds - collectively known as Darwin's finches. These are the descendants of the birds which led Charles Darwin to develop his theory of the origin of species - for example why birds vary in their appearance, behaviour and food preferences. Darwin postulated that the different species of finches on the Galapagos Islands have all descended or evolved from one type of ancestral finch which first inhabited the islands hundreds of years ago.

One part of Darwin's theory relates to the availability of different food sources on the various islands, which he suggested had led to the development of quite different shapes and sizes of beaks of the different resident finches.

*Bills of Darwin Finches,
to same scale.*



Large Ground Finch



Woodpecker Finch



Warbler Finch

For example the *cactus finch* has a long thick bill, slightly de-curved, which is used to peck at moderately hard seeds such as those of the prickly pear cactus, but the *warbler finch* has a thin pointed bill and feeds by picking insects and spiders from leaves and twigs. I spent two weeks in the Galapagos a couple of months ago, and saw for myself most of the thirteen species of Darwin finch. I was not able to identify all the different birds just by looking at their beaks, but nonetheless I saw the very obvious differences between them. Thus the *woodpecker finch* has an elongated and relatively stout bill, which is used to probe into dead wood or cracks in tree bark to find large insects, whilst the very common *small ground finch* behaves

and looks much like our own house sparrow, taking a variety of seeds from plants or from the ground.

Darwin showed that these various finches occurred nowhere else on earth, and must have evolved in the isolation of the Galapagos. He suggested that the different species had developed to fit particular niches in the environment and ecology of the islands, each being more successful and competitive in one definite area, and concentrating on one preferred food source. The evolution of these finches had been accelerated by the remoteness of the archipelago, but Darwin also suggested that the same factors had led to the differentiation and origin of all species, everywhere on earth.

Which brings us back to the birds in our Croxley Green gardens. The robin finds an evolutionary benefit - and passes its genes on to the next generation more successfully - by holding a territory which is well stocked with worms and grubs, and defending it against rivals. The blue tit's advantage comes from its light weight and acrobatic ability so that it can find plentiful food at the very tips of twigs and branches which heavier birds cannot reach. It can range across a wider area, whether or not other tits are also feeding there, and need not be as aggressive as the robin.

So it is clear that each of the birds in our gardens has its own part to play, just like the characters in the pantomimes, and they will never change roles. The magpie will never be the beautiful princess, and the long-tailed tits will never act the swaggering bad baron. But provided that their foods and nesting sites are available, they will continue to grace our garden stages. Advice on the identification and feeding of garden birds is freely available from the Watford RSPB Group, and although the group's indoor meetings programme has already included a talk on the Galapagos Islands there are many other interesting topics to be illustrated before the end of the season. For details please contact the Group Secretary, at 98 Sheepecot Lane, Garston, WD25 0EB.

CGRA - AGM

Tuesday 19th March 2001

Drugs and Money

The hope is that an enigmatic title might just catch your eye! *PPIs* and *statins* are big business drugs, no doubt making millions for the companies that make them. In our practice these two groups of drugs top the poll of our most expensive prescriptions, and the pattern is similar across the country. These medicines are used a lot because they do their job well, but their widespread

use causes concern for health authorities. All GPs receive regular feedback about their prescribing patterns, and have periodic visitations by prescribing advisers from their Primary Care Trust, to encourage wise prescribing and to help keep costs down. Not surprisingly, there is a lot of interest in *PPIs* and *statins*.

The proton pump is the fanciful name for the last stage of the acid release mechanism of the cells lining the stomach. Proton Pump Inhibitors (*PPIs*) cut this acid production by 90%. They help any illnesses and symptoms where too much acid causes harm - such as reflux oesophagitis, peptic ulcers, and even simple indigestion. If you suffer with your stomach you may well have come across them. Examples of this class of drugs are omeprazole (*Losec*) and lansoprazole (*Zoton*). In the third quarter of last year, just these two *PPI* drugs accounted for £17,000 expenditure in our practice alone.

Doctors like using medicines that work, and (another surprise) patients like taking them. But there is a problem. Drugs like this, which command high prices, soak up a large chunk of the NHS budget and that, as is all too clear these days, has a knock-on effect on other NHS services. There are well-researched guidelines to help GPs know when to start a patient on a *PPI*, but doctors do not seem to be so good at knowing when to stop these drugs or even cut the dose down. It seems patients are happy to stick on their original (often high) dose because that's the dose that worked when they were in trouble; and doctors continue prescribing the same dose - perhaps because the patient never comes back for review, or perhaps because they don't want to risk provoking a return of symptoms.

Our Primary Care Trust is actively encouraging GPs to monitor *PPI* prescribing very carefully, reducing it where appropriate so that you, the patient, takes the lowest effective dose. This makes good sense in terms of lower overall costs, freeing more money to provide other NHS services, and lowering side effects for patients. (Yes, even these rather clever drugs have them, diarrhoea being top of the heap!). So if you are taking one of these drugs on a long-term basis, do see your doctor from time to time to check whether you could come off it, benefit from a lower dose, or even switch to a cheaper brand that will work just as well. If you're taking more drug than you need, the only people really laughing are the manufacturer's shareholders. I should add that there are of course many crucial non-drug ways to help acid-related symptoms, not least being eating regularly and not smoking - but of course you know that already!

And what about *statins*? These are the much-touted cholesterol lowering drugs that help cut blood fat levels when dieting alone has failed. They too are expensive, two of them, simvastatin (*Zocor*) and atorvastatin (*Lipitor*) also accounting for almost £17,000 in the same three months in our practice last year. They are indeed impressive, and work by inhibiting a liver enzyme our bodies need to manufacture cholesterol. They greatly cut down levels of total cholesterol and particularly of LDL, the low-density lipoprotein that does damage to arteries.

Starting to take a statin drug is a big step for a patient and the NHS. The drug only works when you are taking it, so treatment is for life. No patient wants to take drugs for ever unless the benefits are crystal clear and the risks known, and the loss to the NHS of vital funds if a patient takes one of these drugs unnecessarily is enormous - around £300-400 per year per patient. So again, after an initial wave of enthusiastic prescribing, a national, and locality based, protocol has evolved to promote appropriate prescribing by GPs and hospital doctors of these drugs. In the UK the guideline is all about assessing the patient's overall cardiovascular risk.

Just like patients (I really mean *people*, you, me, all of us) are beginning to know some of our own vital statistics like blood pressure and cholesterol, we will soon be making a note of our CHD (coronary heart disease) percentage risk. This is calculated by tables or computer programmes using key factors like age, sex, smoking habit, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. In Britain, the Department of Health recommends doctors start patients on a statin drug if their cholesterol remains above target (total cholesterol < 5.0, LDL < 3.0 after careful low fat dieting) and their CHD risk works out at 30% or more over ten years. In Europe, statin treatment is started at a 20% risk level. The DOH plan is to lower the recommended level for statin intervention later on as resources allow once all those at highest risk have been treated.

With statins, doctors and patients can work together to make sure expensive drugs are used wisely. Patients can ask about their own CHD percentage risk, and do what they can to cut it down as much as possible without drugs. They can join in the decision, with their doctor, about whether or not they take life-long drug treatment. All of us, doctors and patients (or should I say health care providers and consumers!), can do our bit to make sure we use expensive, powerful medicines sensibly. Drugs and money, money and drugs. They go together like peaches and ... low fat *fromage fraise*?

Nigel Corp, general practitioner.

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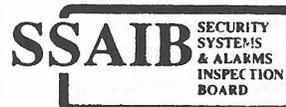
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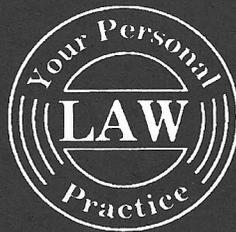
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