



Unlock nature's clues to our rural past

Natural history expert **Linda Dolata** explains how a walk around East Finchley can transport you hundreds of years back in time.

Over the months, the virus restrictions have encouraged us to take many more local walks, and how lucky we are in East Finchley. A view of the horizon in any direction will usually include mature trees, and our roads are lined with beautiful London planes, limes, ginkgos, hawthorns and sorbus trees.

We have so many green areas. Remnants of an ancient forest can be found in Coldfall Wood, Coppett's Wood, Cherry Tree Wood, Highgate Wood, Queen's Wood, Kenwood, Big Wood, Little Wood; all within a couple of walkable miles.

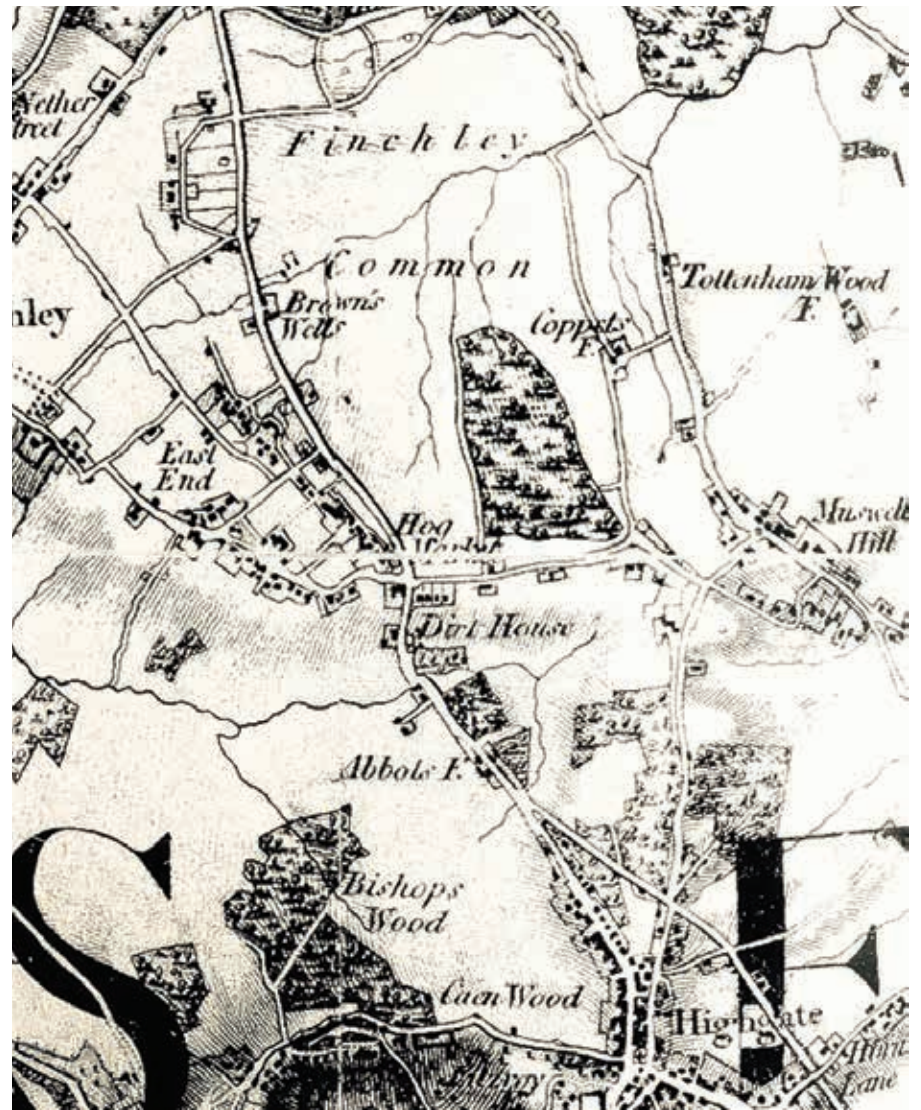
ash and sycamore.

The farms and Common recorded on 19th century maps of our area can still be seen in part as parks, allotments, cemeteries, playing fields, scraps of pasture and private gardens. Some of the older trees in the

rural past. And any patch of bare grass soon shows what survives in the seed bank.

The hawthorns edging the High Road (near the Vue cinema area, for example) show the horizontal limbs that were cut and laid (by a hedgelay) when this was a drovers' road; a veteran oak once on the notorious Finchley Common, now grows surreptitiously within 10 yards of the North Circular behind an ancient hedgerow (Font Hill, off Long Lane); and even the bushes either side of the North Circular show every spring the lambs-tail catkins of the hazels that remain from their coppiced ancestors.

Look carefully and our centuries-old footpaths are still honoured (Ploughman's Walk and Pumphandle Path, off Oak Lane), one at least even having its own little pedestrian bridge over the North Circular from the top of Tarling Road with again hazel and elm, field maples, hawthorn and dog roses pointing back in time



Common land: How East Finchley, then East End, looked in 1822, with the Great North Road and Fortis Green crossroads in the centre and what is today's High Road running north alongside the open land of Finchley Common



Well-trodden: Ploughman's Walk started as a path through fields and is still a much-used route through the middle of homes between Long Lane and Tarling Road

A working landscape

Most of these retain the signs of their past use as working woods, with coppiced hornbeam and hazel, and timber trees of oak, no longer harvested, along with the colonising birch,

East Finchley Cemetery off East End Road survive from that long-gone farmland.

Wood anemones, mistletoe, speedwell, cow parsley, hawkbit... many simple plants still appear, reminders of our more

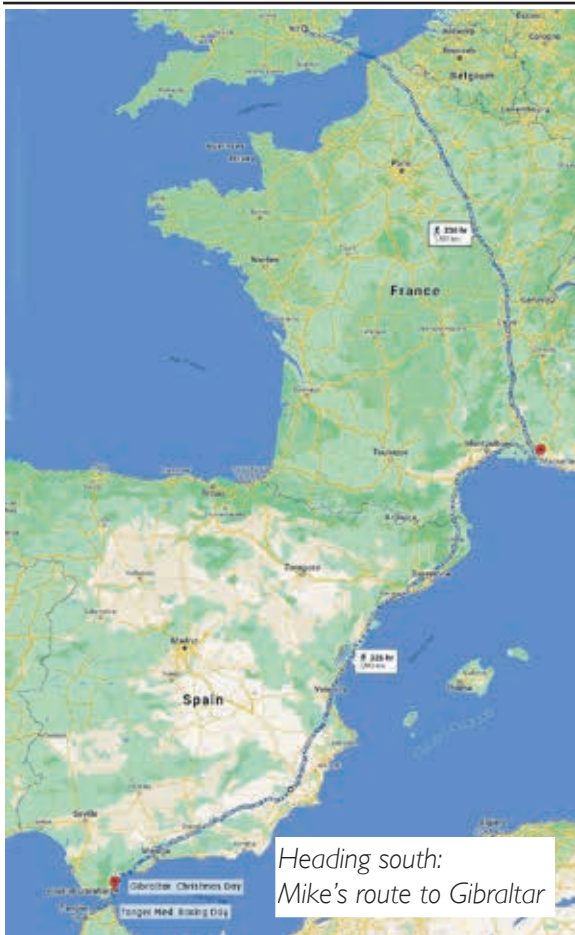
to the hedges that surrounded the path.

Time-travel

I would suggest to anyone who is getting bored with this lockdown to get hold of an old Ordnance Survey map and use it to imagine the past (you can probably use your phones for this). The place names often

hold marvellous clues... manor, wood, coppetts (copse or coppice), glade, lane, way, green, well, grove, hurst (clearing in a wood), ley (meadow).

So, living in a meadow with finches as we do, maybe this winter and spring are a good time to explore the story of its past in depth.



Heading south:
Mike's route to Gibraltar

All the way to Africa on foot

Our photo editor Mike Coles has walked every day for almost a year. Here he updates us on where his daily treks have taken him.

Last spring, with the first lockdown impending, I thought I had better do something to keep fit and sane so I decided to do a 'virtual' walk into Europe. I 'left' London a couple of days before lockdown on 17 March 2020 to walk to Marseilles in southern France.

The actual walking was in local streets and parks, my route plotted by Google Maps and my daily distance recorded by my fitness band and my phone GPS. By the middle of July, after 124 days at an average of 9.6 km per day (about six miles), I reached Marseilles and left the next morning walking towards the Pyrenees. On the first day of September, I reached Sils in northern Spain, and passed the milestone of 1,000 miles of walking. I wasn't ready to stop so carried on southwards through Barcelona, Valencia and Murcia.

On Christmas Day, after 285 consecutive days, I found myself in The Rock Hotel in Gibraltar,

where I last stayed on a work trip in 1972. On Boxing Day morning, I got the ferry to Tanger Med, the largest port in Africa, about 40km east of Tangiers in Morocco. The actual ferry is temporarily suspended because of COVID, but in my virtual world it's still running. Saturday 9 January was a new landmark: my 300th consecutive day of walking, and I was now covering more than 10 km per day, putting me 1,864 miles from London.

The whole of the African continent lies before me so I am now heading south along the Moroccan coast to Essaouira, west of Marrakesh. If I can keep up the pace Google thinks I should be there by 7 March.

Mindful baking

East Finchley resident Ines Lanza is to host a five-week series of free family-friendly online sourdough baking workshops. A Grange Big Local Community Grants funded project, the workshops will be open to local residents of all ages, backgrounds, and baking experience.

Ines said she wants people to come out of the sessions more settled, rested and feeling better connected to others, adding that few things are as comforting as baking a good loaf of bread.

Workshops will take place on Saturday afternoons from 27 February. Sign up by contacting Ines directly at: ines_lanza@yahoo.it. You can follow her on Instagram @mindful_sourdough for more updates on the programme.