

A LOT OF FUSS ABOUT A FEW POLES AND SOME WIRE? MIKE VERDIN INVESTIGATES

On the trail of the eruv

WHEN proposals to enclose much of North-West London in an eruv have created such an outcry, it seems strange that the two small versions of the scheme in Golders Green are accompanied by such silence.

It takes a sharp eye to spot the 30 yards of wire running across the mouths of Woodlands Close and Park Way, declaring the eruv boundary and allowing orthodox Jewish residents to uphold less-strict Sabbath laws.

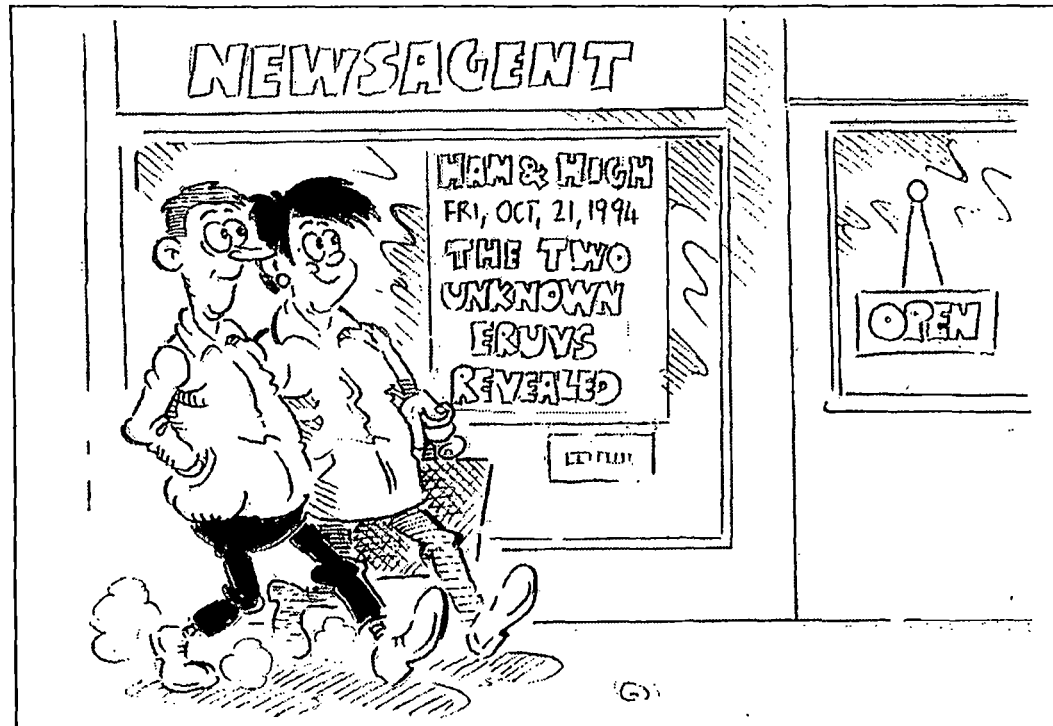
And it takes a keen ear to detect any disquiet in the cul-de-sacs, two of a worldwide network of eruvs decreed by some as "Jewish ghettos".

In Woodlands Close residents chatter about how the eruv has transformed their Sabbath life, allowed them to carry prayers books to worship, carry children and push invalid relatives in wheelchairs.

And in Park Way the air of peace amid the Neighbourhood Watch signs is even more pervasive.

"What eruv?" asked one man in orthodox dress with a 20-foot eruv pole sticking out of his garden.

"I don't know anything about it,"



And I thought only Damon Hill battled for pole position!

said another, more elderly, resident.

"We are not aware of granting a licence for putting a wire across the entrance into Park Way," said a spokesman for Barnet Council, which in 1990 gave permission for the Woodlands Close eruv. "We will be investigating the matter."

The existence of an eruv in Riverside Drive, a block of flats in Golders Green, was also denied by one orthodox Jewish resident, despite confirmation by another.

It is little surprise that even proponents of the main eruv, which would encompass six and a half square miles of Golders Green, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Hendon, pleaded ignorance of all but the Woodlands enclosure.

Indeed, fear of publicity stoking controversy over eruvs in Britain would appear to be nothing new.

"The idea was first aired in Golders Green some years ago, in the 1950s I think," said Mendel Kreditor, who with a fellow non-practising rabbi organised the setting

up of the Woodlands Close eruv. "But it did not get universal approval from the rabbis and so never happened. More orthodox rabbis believe the Sabbath laws should be upheld whatever, while others were worried about causing confrontation with other communities."

Mr Mendel proposed the Woodlands Close eruv to help him and his wife look after four young children. Sabbath laws upheld by orthodox Jews dictate that no work, not even carrying keys, can be undertaken on the Sabbath outside the home.

Woodlands Close resident Sharon Lazenga said: "You have no idea what a difference the eruv has made. It has changed my way of life and helped build up a real sense of community, between Jews and members of other faiths."

While the road boasts a non-Jewish Nigerian family, at least two Christians, and a Hindu who had not noticed the eruv wire in the two years she had lived in the road, it

was a woman born to an orthodox Jewish family in the East End who was the eruv's only opponent.

The woman, Gerry Myers, said: "What is the point of laws if you do not obey them? I certainly do not remember anything about eruvs when I was young."

Eruv proponents, however, argue that the enclaves date from at least the time of Christ and maybe Moses, some 1,200 years earlier.

But whatever residents' beliefs, it emerged there could be financial compensations. Mrs Lazenga reported "a number of offers" from people wanting to move into the Woodlands Close eruv, although her house is not on the market. Even Mrs Myers admitted an unsolicited offer had been made for her home during the summer.

Whether this attraction will be enough to realise fears of a "Jewish ghetto" within the proposed north London eruv, or to silence critics with homes on the market, remains to be seen.

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