

Institute Henrietta Barnett row makes headlines

Our report of the Institute AGM in the last issue and John Enderby's letter castigating the Institute set off an avalanche of correspondence in the Ham and High, the Hendon Times and letters from the Institute to RA Chairman Eileen Whelan.

It was the Ham and High that picked up on John Enderby's letter "Institute caught up in asset sales row" and at the same time reported Fay Naylor's and Douglas Blausten's anger at what they considered a biased and sarcastic report of the AGM.

After five weeks of correspondence in the local press the news broke that the Education Secretary, John Patten, had been given authority by Parliament to pay Henrietta Barnett School's legal fees but not those of the Institute "MP accused of backing school in Suburb battle". This led to further accusations that John Marshall and John Patten, were backing the school.

At the end of March the news "Barnet pressure on Institute is condemned", of Barnet's provision of £129,000 for the Institute for the coming year, an increase of £29,000, was welcomed by Malcolm Davis, in a letter to Hendon Times, with "To try and pretend that the funding now proposed should solve all the Institutes problems, displays sheer ignorance at its best and gross dishonesty at its worst". It was also announced that a grant of £98,500 had been promised by the Government Further Education Funding Council, an increase of almost £83,000, in recognition of its EFL courses.

Backing

We are sorry that the Institute feels that anyone who is not backing their action is necessarily anti Institute. This not the case. The RA has sought to find a solution whereby both can remain and indeed has lobbied Mr Marshall on behalf of

the Institute on numerous occasions. Many residents are not convinced, and have not been told why the Institute could not cut its coat according to its cloth and find a way to survive alongside the school.

Suburb News

Whatever Malcolm Davis, Fay Naylor and Douglas Blausten may think now, *Suburb News* has tried to report the facts and what residents are saying. The AGM report may have been written in ironic style but many who were at the meeting have since confirmed its accuracy. In the nearly eleven years of the paper, 42 issues, we have run 41 stories about the Institute, many by the Vice Principal, and have printed every article submitted by the Principal. We have also reported residents' concerns about parking problems caused by students and the seemingly permanent temporary buildings.

In trust

The Institute and the school are part of all our lives on the Suburb. The Editor's sister was at Henrietta Barnett in the fifties and his daughter is in the sixth form now. He himself appeared in school plays on the Institute's stage many years ago and has attended Institute courses since. Many Suburb residents, such as Jean Dyson, ex pupil and active Head Governor of the School, have much longer memories and associations. We all regret the present situation and hope that the people running the Institute now, who are holding it in trust for future generations, will draw back from the brink and find another way.

Richard J. Wakefield

Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute

The Principal writes

When Canon Barnett opened the first hall of the Institute on 28th March 1909, he described it as "the first expression of the common life of the Suburb".

During the current legal dispute in which the Institute is seeking to regain the control of its assets, it is easy to lose sight of the purpose for which the Charity was created.



Dame Henrietta and her husband lived and worked for many years in Whitechapel where he was Founder and Warden of Toynbee Hall. Their experiences in East London strengthened their passionate belief in the value of education as a vehicle for social change.

The formation of the Institute was rooted in these ideals:- "The Institute Council asks for the help of those who realise the paramount importance of varied education for the people of all ages, classes of society, all standards of income and all political parties."

The early years of the Institute were a brilliant implementation of Dame Henrietta's vision with over thirty organisations using the premises, a full time art school, a music school presided over by Sir Henry Wood, lectures and debates with national celebrities in attendance, a library and an ambitious programme of courses.

Over a period of time, the growth of child education on the site resulted in the sacrifice of many of these facilities and activities but the Charity survived albeit with frequent crises about finance and accommodation and it still presents a very attractive and highly popular programme of activities which is being maintained due to the voluntary efforts of many staff who are working in excess of their contracted hours and the support

of our members.

We are moving the curriculum into new areas to take account of current trends but are prevented from achieving the maximum in terms of income and outside funding due to shortage of accommodation and lack of money to invest in equipment. In spite of this a large number of our courses fill very quickly and we take waiting lists. More daytime accommodation would enable us to increase income and substantially as evening classes can only be of two or three hours duration and there is a limit to the income which can be achieved. More full time courses like the Prefoundation and Portfolio Art Course which has attracted European funding would enable us to offer the kind of facilities which would attract additional outside funding of this type.

Our students come to us for a variety of reasons: some wish to gain access to more advanced courses in further or higher education, others aim to acquire skills to gain employment or to use their leisure creatively. The programme includes a substantial number of junior courses for children of all ages and there are plans to strengthen this very popular area of our work. At a time of mass unemployment, shorter working lives and a low national morale, what the Institute provides has never been more important.

What a tragedy therefore that the Department for Education clearly does not value what the Institute is achieving for the community. Instead of concentrating the efforts of his department on working towards a solution to the severe accommodation and financial problems of the School and the Institute, Mr

Patten has chosen to place a Statutory Instrument before Parliament to enable Government to pay the School's legal fees before the evidence for the case has been gathered and presented. I leave others to judge whether this is an example of a fair and even handed decision by a member of the Cabinet or whether it is a strategy aimed at prolonging the litigation and thereby disadvantaging the Institute which will be funding its own legal expenses. Mr Patten was requested to treat both sides equally and either fund the legal expenses of both or neither but he refused this request.

This action indicates that no recognition is being given to the sacrifices made by the Institute over a long period to subsidise the School and the education authorities which have had the benefit of an excellent Adult Education Institute and a state school with an outstanding reputation on a very modest level of public funding.

The Department for Education have demonstrated that the survival of the Institute is a matter of no concern to them. I hope that the many members of the community who use and work in the Institute will make their views known to their Members of Parliament and Councillors on the action taken by the Government.

With or without the help of the authorities, the Institute will continue to implement the wishes of the Founder with even greater success.

"At the Institute people of every shade of thought can unite to exchange ideas and by their care for literature, art, music, history or nature obliterate class barriers."

Fay Naylor

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