

# Henrietta's own account

With a foreword by Suburb notable, Martin Bell, this facsimile of Dame Henrietta's own account of the founding and early years of Hampstead Garden Suburb is a treat. While she generously credits the architects and assorted philanthropists who helped to realise her vision, her story in essence documents one woman's tireless pursuit of a dream – that all classes could live in neighbourliness together, away from the noise and dirt of London's East End where she had worked alongside her husband in his Whitechapel parish.

The story takes us from the blossoming of her idea for a Garden Suburb at the turn of the century through to 1928 and the Suburb's gradual development into a functioning community.

Her voice rings loudly on every page, whether chivvying money or support from paternalistic bureaucrats, drinking coffee with the Queen, defending the Institute from military clutches during World War I, or applauding the thrift of women who had saved for their homes through the United Women's Homes Association. (Architect Sir Edwin Lutyens described their cottage flats – Queen's Court, currently undergoing extensive renovation – as the Suburb's 'best bit of modern domestic architecture'.)

Although quietly proud of her achievements, she remains briskly honest about her failures. Unkind neighbours protested vehemently about the hymn-singing old ladies in the Salvation Army's Adelaide House, while cherished schemes

for a convalescent home, charitable housing for blind people, a 'Hill of Friendship' on Bunker Hill reconciling England and America, a home for 'decayed ladies', and a bird sanctuary all came to nothing.

Looking back over the Suburb's first two decades, Barnett admits to two abiding disappointments. Although outwardly the reality matched her earliest dreams, she was disappointed first, that individuals too often put their own desires before the common good and second, that most people living in the suburb knew nothing of its ideals. Long before rising house prices frustrated her well-intentioned attempts at

social engineering, she wondered, too, if residents made any real friendships across the classes. Liberally illustrated with rather murky images of Suburb people and places, Dame Henrietta's story deserves a place on every resident's bookshelf, if only to remind us of the aesthetic and social ethos underlying the suburb's foundation.

JENNIFER POTTER

*The Story of the Growth of the Hampstead Garden Suburb 1907-1928 by Dame Henrietta Barnett, D.B.E. (Hampstead Garden Suburb Archive Trust for the Centenary, 2006).*

# Only a Woman

A sickly, motherless baby – who would have predicted that she would turn into such a redoubtable Dame? Alison Creedon's biography chronicles the transition.

Henrietta Barnett (nee Rowland) grew up in the care of a wealthy and indulgent father – but also of an ice-cold aunt. Nevertheless she soon developed into a lively (and rebellious) teenager – partly because she was sent to an enlightened boarding school with a charismatic headmistress who got her involved in a major social problem of the Victorian era – abandoned children; their lives a complete contrast to her own pampered upbringing. This fuelled the ebullient Henrietta's rejection of the stultifying role of middle-class women at the time.

The next big influence on her life was housing reformer Octavia Hill with whom she worked as a volunteer in Marylebone. In the course of this she met the diffident, bumbling and bald young curate, Samuel Barnett. His sensitivity and perceptive temperament perfectly complemented her practical and go-ahead character. They married and moved to St Jude's parish in the squalid and smelly district of Bethnal Green, notorious for its criminals, prostitutes and vermin. From their work there, they took occasional respite in a cottage by Hampstead Heath which was later to lead to Henrietta's most famous achievement.

Meanwhile, to finance their work on housing reform and the provision of parks and playgrounds, Henrietta sold her jewels and, largely in pursuit of their enlightened view that education should be more than the rote-learning of facts, they established Toynbee Hall as a centre for

lectures, boys' clubs, legal aid, concerts and much more.

Samuel and Henrietta also tackled the reform of 'barracks' schools in which orphans were regularly ill-treated, set up the Children's Country Holiday Fund, established the Whitechapel Art Gallery and launched other enterprises; all this despite Henrietta's increasingly ill health.

Samuel became a canon; first of Bristol and then of Westminster Abbey. They had no children but adopted a daughter who sadly died at the age of 17.

Henrietta was galvanised into fresh action when she learnt that her beloved Heath was threatened with property development when the underground railway was extended into Golders Green. She raised £22,000 to buy and preserve what is now known as the Heath Extension. Out of this grew her plan for a garden suburb around it (inspired by her visit to the Cadbury model village of Bourneville). No mean streets of gardenless 'boxes' were to be built; no pubs to generate violence; just varied houses, trees, hedges of briar or yew, open spaces – the country brought into town. She was turned down (a mere woman) until she recruited male backers of standing to support her plans. However, she still had to fight to get them running and, in so doing, became labelled as despotic and overbearing – the usual response of non-believers to anyone whose single-mindedness and resolution actually gets things done. Her monument is to be seen all about us today.

ELIZABETH COCKBURN

*Only a Woman is on sale at the Garden Suburb Gallery (£20)*

# Brighton Beach Memoirs

Ros and Michael Berg's directorial debut for the Garden Suburb Theatre in October 2006, was Neil Simon's semi-autobiographical play, 'Brighton Beach Memoirs'.

The play, the first of a trio written between 1983 and 1986, is set in Brooklyn in 1937 and deals with the effects of the Depression on a Jewish family. Looming over their heads also is their anxiety about relatives in Europe. The memoirs belong to the youngest son, Eugene Jerome, a 15 year old who dreams of being a baseball player. With his parents, Kate and Jack and his older brother, Stanley live Kate's sister, Blanche Morton and her two daughters, Nora and Laurie. In such a crowded household, the lack of money and family tensions cause disagreements.

Ros and Michael Berg brought out all the humour and poignancy in the play. They also had a marvellous female cast and an excellent Jerome in Alon Witztum.

The family relationship was well portrayed by Judith Gubbay as Kate and Dianne Kingsley as Blanche. Judith Gubbay as the indomitable Kate was especially good. Hilary Udow and Robyn Jacobs also brought interest to the sisters, Laurie and Nora. Nick Vause did all he could with the under-written part of the Father, Jack, while Matthew Ali dealt well with the meatier part of Stanley, Eugene's elder brother troubled by his inability to bring money into the household. The fine set was by Jane Rogers.

LÉONIE STEPHEN

# Horticultural Society 'wins' lottery



Members of Hampstead Garden Suburb Horticultural Society are cock-a-hoop on their success in receiving a lottery grant of £3,000 from Awards for All (England). To help celebrate the Centenary, the Society wanted to find a project that would involve and benefit the local community, be representative of its own activities and make a major contribution to the Suburb's festivities. A member came up with the idea of a commemorative flowerbed and the project took off.

With the blessing of its members, the HGS Residents Association, The HGS Trust and the London Borough of Barnet, the Society decided to construct a decorative raised flowerbed on the corner of Willifield Green at the heart of the Suburb. Garden designer and lecturer Stephen Crisp (gardener to the US Ambassador at his Regents Park residence and long-time friend of the Society) was commissioned to come up with a simple but elegantly formal design loosely based on the Suburb's official centenary logo (see above).

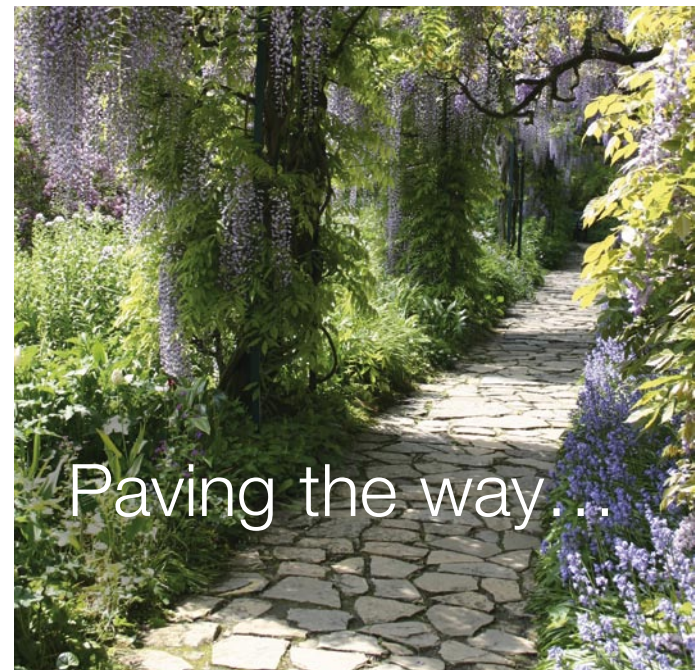
The letters, commemorative dates and background will be picked out in carpet bedding within a timber frame disguised by box hedging. The bed will slope by about 30 degrees so that it can be seen easily. Plants for the lettering and decoration are already being grown by a

specialist company. Mill Hill garden centre Finchley Nurseries will add extra colour to the scheme by donating two elegant planters filled with seasonal flowers to stand alongside.

The 'garden on the green' will be in place from 2 May, when it will be launched as part of the official centenary opening ceremonies. Children from nearby Garden Suburb Infants School will help Society members and gardening professionals to plant the flowerbed for the launch and maintain it while in place, as part of their curriculum. Head Teacher Sarah Sands has supported the scheme from the beginning, as has Garden Suburb Ward councillor Andrew Harper.

Society Chairman, Marjorie Harris, said, "Even simple designs like this are very expensive to fulfil. We are thrilled to have won a lottery grant. We are so grateful to Awards for All (England). There will be many visitors to the Suburb during the celebrations. We hope they and local residents will enjoy the flowerbed from May until at least the first frosts."

The Horticultural Society is also hosting a special centenary Spring Flower Show on 31 March (2-4pm at Fellowship House). Visitors to the Summer Show on 16 June (3-5.30pm at the Free Church Hall) will spot 'Dame Henrietta' scarecrows and baking competitions based on a 1907 cookbook.



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# Arts and Crafts Utopia?

In 1992, Mervyn Miller and Stuart Gray wrote a book about Hampstead Garden Suburb. Now 15 years later, he has brought out a second edition called 'Arts and Crafts Utopia' bringing the story of the Suburb up to date. A great deal has happened during these 15 years, including the death of Stuart Gray. He has witnessed the divisive Eruv issue and the battle between the Institute and Henrietta Barnett School which has resulted in the Institute leaving the Suburb almost entirely. He has expanded the chapters on the damage and loss of life during the last war as well as the place of religion in the community. Whether or not the Suburb is Utopia is debatable. It is certainly not the Utopia that Dame Henrietta Barnett had envisaged. The Suburb has become very expensive and the demands to

change or pull down houses has grown. The motor car has also become a menace. Garages are too small for modern cars and the desire to turn front gardens into hard-standings has increased. Thankfully all this is being strongly refused.

This handsome book, printed on fine paper and with a wealth of beautiful colour and black and white photographs, comes out to celebrate the Centenary of this special place and tells the story from the beginning to the present day. And what a hundred years it has been; there were many dangers but the Suburb has survived.

Mervyn Miller, architect, town planner and international authority on the Garden City movement has a long association with the Suburb. He has done us proud.

LÉONIE STEPHEN

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