

Suburb News Youth

C E L E B R A T I N G W O M E N

Girl Power!

As a teenage girl fast approaching womanhood, it is particularly eye-opening for me to reflect back on just how much the lives of women have changed since VE day, almost exactly 75 years ago.

VE day was the day when the allies of World War II celebrated Nazi Germany's surrender. Street parties were held, bonfires were lit, and there was not a street in sight where the merry sounds of dancing and singing could not be heard. But it was not only the brave young soldiers fighting on the battlefield who we are to owe this victory to. Women had about as much a part in the victory of World War II as men!

Prior to the second world war, women mostly held domestic, household roles. Their job was to keep the home tidy and

functioning well, so that their husbands would be pleased when they came home from work. Don't you hate it when your parents tell you to clean your room? Well, try imagining a life when you're expected to clean every room of the house... every day! And it was not just older women who were expected to carry out these household duties: young girls were also required to help their mothers dust and tidy and fold, since less emphasis was placed on their education – that was reserved for boys (unless you belonged to the working classes). While many girls did attend primary school, few at that time continued through to secondary education and it was relatively rare for girls to go on to university. Cambridge University did not accept girls until 1948!

However, with thousands of men away serving in the armed forces, the role of girls and young women during World War II began to change. From 1941, women were called up to be mechanics, engineers, and fire engine drivers. By mid-1943, almost 90 percent of single women and 80 percent of married women were working in factories, on the land or in the armed forces. The idea that women would be able to take up these jobs would have been deemed impossible before World War II. What's more, there were over 640,000 women in the armed forces, both in the navy and air force. Even Princess Elizabeth worked as a member of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) at the age of 19, and was promoted to Junior Commander!

There was also a 'secret army' (known as the SOE), of around 60 women who were dropped from planes into Germany to prepare the way for the Allied invasion. One of the most famous SOE members was Vera Leigh. Although she was eventually captured and murdered by the Nazis, the remarkable bravery she demonstrated still lives on today.

To summarise, it was not only men who contributed to Britain's victory 75 years ago, but also women. Women who, because of how heroically they united together, showed the men they were capable of so much more than was previously believed. Perhaps it is partly thanks to their actions that I can stand here today, as a pupil of the Henrietta Barnett School, with so many opportunities in my path. It is with a warm feeling in my heart that I embrace the future ahead of me as a strong, independent female, inspired to show the world what the term 'Girl Power!' really means.

ALLIE G

A letter to Henrietta Barnett: a woman ahead of her time

When the London Underground was going to be extended in 1899, near your weekend home by Spaniard's Inn in Hampstead, you immediately set about preserving the natural, peaceful ambience of the Suburb. You envisioned something ahead of its time – just over 100 years later, we live in an era of 'eco' and 'green' campaigns as we struggle to coexist with our planet.

Even though you were told you were "just a woman" by Eton College who owned the land that would later become the Hampstead Garden Suburb, you persevered. You campaigned, fundraised, and formed a company that would eventually buy that land. It's a lesson we can all take with us: don't give up and one day you will succeed.

When you met Octavia Hill, a pioneer female architect, a seed of an idea was planted for the Garden Suburb. But you'd always been in love with nature and tranquillity. Your brainchild – the Hampstead Garden Suburb – was inspired by the likes of the Garden City movement and Bournville Village. Now it houses 13,000 residents. But what's worth even more is the close-knit community that was built and has grown.

Your tireless campaign protected the Garden Suburb as we know it today. It's you we have to thank for the Hampstead Garden Suburb Act (1906); protecting our tree-lined roads and recreation grounds or open spaces "for the common use of the inhabitants of any dwellings in the Garden Suburb."

Even though you were daughter of a wealthy businessman, born in Clapham, you soon became intent on activism after you went to school aged 16. Inspired by its ability to encourage minds that could think, you dedicated your life to helping others: founding the London Pupil Teachers Association, working with Homes for Workhouse Girls, and as Vice President of

the National Union of Women Workers. It's then hardly surprising that you founded the Henrietta Barnett School, providing education for girls of all backgrounds, even during a time where fewer than 1% of women and girls went to university. Did you imagine the school you built would go on to educate more than three generations? That your picture still hangs in the Main Hall, observing the girls below?

Your legacy isn't limited to the Suburb – you received a well-deserved DBE (Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire) for your work – the results of your philanthropy remain relevant even with the passage of time.

We have privileges that define the Suburb: no shrill school bells, no cramped buildings packed onto dirty tarmac, and the Heath Extension which protects us from the noisy, greyish concrete that is London. Your lifetime's work has given us a gift that will last generations.

ISABELLE H



Henrietta Barnett

Can a naked lady ever be a feminist icon?

Growing up, I always loved driving past Henlys Corner and spotting 'the naked lady', as I called it. Now, though, I am beginning to wonder about the implications of how women are represented in this iconic piece of public art...

'The Naked Lady' is not her name, and neither is 'Dirty Gertie' as some people call her. The statue at Henlys Corner is a First World War memorial, created in 1914 by Émile Oscar Guillaume and originally named 'La Victoire', in honour of the First Battle of the Marne, when the German army was defeated before capturing Paris. At some point her name was changed to 'La Délivrance' and she was given to Finchley Council in 1927; the then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George held the unveiling ceremony to a crowd of 8,000.

'La Délivrance' depicts a nude woman holding a sword and reaching towards the sky in celebration.

She has 11 sisters (all smaller than our 4.9m) that were given to French and Belgian cities that were occupied by the Germans. In 1919, a copy in Lille was taken down as the nudity proved too controversial. It was bought by the city of Nantes and vandalised there too before being finally restored and reinstated in 2018. As a point of interest, Emile Guillaume was a pacifist who used his sculptures to promote his idea. A generous way to view this statue is that Guillaume is simply representing victory and freedom as the French do – as feminine nouns. Nudity has long represented liberation in art, whatever the subject's gender. However, one could also interpret 'the Naked Lady' as yet another example of women's bodies being objectified and designed to be beautiful to the male gaze, which is more problematic. In a world so enamoured by the female body, it begs the question: why is having one still a hindrance? There is little information available about Émile Oscar Guillaume's intentions or his other work, so 'La Délivrance' is open to interpretation and I choose to view it as a symbol for France (also a feminine

noun in French). Interestingly, 'La Délivrance' holds a sword, even though women were not allowed to fight, perhaps because she represents the whole of the nation. In this case, I find it a compelling and empowering image.

Upon seeing a statue of a naked woman, it is easy to write it off as degrading and objectifying to us today, however this is to grossly over-simplify the work of art. Though it is not lost on me that 'La Délivrance' is by a man, it is important to try and find value in his representation of women; as beautiful beacons of hope and success. Regardless of Guillaume's intentions, 'the Naked Lady' is an eye-catching representation of strength in the form of a nude female body, which is especially welcome as too often women are overlooked and cast as the weaker sex.

Women today can still be empowered by the statue 'La Délivrance' by choosing to view it as a symbol of female power.

These are our bodies being represented, and the only wrong way to interpret these sculptures is as images of women for men to enjoy, when instead we should take these monuments as proof of the power of women. We can represent freedom, liberation, and strength, with or without our clothes on.

ROSA B



My brother Lonnie with The Naked Lady

Become part of the community



If you'd like to join the Suburb community, please complete and return the form below or join online at hgsra.uk. Our Privacy Policy can be viewed at hgsra.uk/about/dataprotection.html.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

One subscription covers everyone at the address for a calendar year
I/We would like to join the HGS Residents Association.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Subscription amount (Minimum payment £15) £ _____

Fellowship donation* (Optional) £ _____

(To support Fellowship, a Suburb charity, in its work for Suburb senior citizens)

Total £ _____

* I declare by making this donation that I want to Gift Aid my donations to Fellowship House and am a UK taxpayer paying sufficient tax to meet the Gift Aid on my donation. I agree to Fellowship receiving my details for this purpose.

(Delete the above declaration if you do not wish to Gift Aid your donation or do not pay sufficient tax)

I wish to pay:

☐ by cheque (payable to HGS Residents Association). Please write your address on the back of the cheque and send with this form to the address below.

☐ online via PayPal or with Credit or Debit Card – visit hgsra.uk/join

☐ by bank transfer to HGS Residents Association:

Bank: HSBC, 897 Finchley Road, NW11 7NX Sort Code: 40-03-11

Account number: 91605747

Please return this form to: The Membership Secretary, HGS Residents Association, PO Box 67700, London NW11 1NS.

(SN143)