

# The 'Actual' Vision of Henrietta Barnett

Henrietta Barnett's (née Rowland) education and upbringing was – for its time – unusual. Her mother, also Henrietta, (who died 16 days after her birth) was a German Catholic. She was the youngest of eight children in what was presumably a bilingual household or at least one that considered itself partly German. Only her age prevented her from volunteering as a nurse with the German army during the Franco-Prussian War. Her father, Alexander, made no effort to inculcate any faith in his children, preferring instead to spend Sunday evenings – the traditional time for family prayers or Bible reading in middle class Victorian homes – teaching them how to look at paintings through his collection of engravings.

When she finally went to school for the first time (at the age of 16 and then only for four terms) it was to an unusual establishment in Dover run by the three Haddon sisters who saw their task as broadening the outlooks of their middle-class charges through an experience of the lives of the less fortunate.

To this end the girls were expected to entertain children from the local workhouse and to visit and support an orphanage that the sisters had founded in the nearby countryside.

Henrietta would later write that her time in Dover had set her on her course in life. However, she might not have been referring only to the fresh air and the mixing of the classes – both of which would later be part of her vision for the Garden Suburb.

The Haddon sisters were much influenced by the husband of a fourth sister, James Hinton, a forgotten figure today but one who had achieved a certain notoriety at the time.

Hinton (1822-1875) was the son of a Baptist minister who at the age of 16 went to work in a draper's shop in Whitechapel. The poverty and moral degradation of the East End made a deep impression, undermined his belief in Christianity, and led him to train as a doctor. In 1852 he married Margaret Haddon and had his own practice as a hearing specialist, but after what he called his 'moral revolution' he became increasingly interested in the connections between



James Hinton

religion, morality and science, and ultimately propounded a religious philosophy of his own which he called 'Actualism'.

Actualism involved the replacement of the Christian understanding of God with a 'Universal Spirit' who was the 'actuality' behind all things. Individual human beings could achieve union with the divine spirit through the service of others. In Hinton's personal case the service of others, as his sister-in-law Caroline Haddon (who edited his writings) later revealed, mainly involved the



Henrietta Barnett

'liberation' of women. The 'Actualist' became convinced that he had a calling to oppose the fetters of Christian monogamy in the name of female emancipation. Both Hinton and Caroline Haddon advocated polygamy as a way of reducing household chores and responsibilities. If a man had two or more wives, the duties of each would be reduced and they would have more time for their own interests and to better meet their husband's needs.

This same Caroline Haddon was described by Henrietta

Barnett as "my teacher and friend [who] had a dynamic effect on my then somnolent character", and wrote in her personal notebook "I thank you, dearest Miss Carrie, for all your boundless goodness to me which has been the foundation of my happiness."

Another of Hinton's ideas was that men should become more like women: they should be 'womaned' – brought under feminine influence and direction to achieve both personal inner harmony and social well-being. Henrietta would marry a man who was described as "almost feminine in his gentleness", and their relationship was an early example of a new sort of 'companionable' marriage in which the traditional roles of the sexes were renegotiated or even reversed.

The marriage was also a model, it might be said, for a renewed human society of which Hampstead Garden Suburb became an early 'actualization'. To fashion this new community Henrietta selected Raymond Unwin, whose plan for a Garden City at Letchworth had just been accepted. Unwin was

himself a disciple of James Hinton – even for a while seeing as his life task the preservation and presentation of Hinton's ideas. With Hinton he saw Christianity as largely responsible for destroying the cooperative and communal character of primitive society in which humans had enjoyed freer and more natural relationships with each other and the environment.

Although polygamy was never part of the plan for Hampstead Garden Suburb, Hinton's ideas about the role of the 'feminine' can perhaps be detected in the project. As well as housing specifically reserved for working women and professional young ladies (Queens Court and Waterlow Court respectively), a girls' school took centre place between the houses of worship.

Although the Suburb is usually presented as a place where the social classes were supposed to live alongside and influence each other, Henrietta Barnett probably saw this as only an aspect of much greater scheme to transform human relationships and create a new kind of community.

REV. ALAN WALKER

## Suburb library summer reading challenge

For the past eight years, the Garden Suburb Community Library has linked with The

Reading Agency to present the Summer Reading Challenge for children aged 3-12 years old.

This year, with all the issues around Covid-19 and lockdown, it was a particular challenge for us as well, but combining it with our very successful Click & Collect service 39 children joined the 'Silly Squad' and got involved. Many completed part or all of the challenge to win stickers, fridge magnets and pencils, with children completing at least six books also winning a certificate and a medal.

As in previous years, the library donated an extra prize for all the children who finished

the challenge having their names put into a draw to win a copy of Roald Dahl's Whizzpopping Joke Book.

Several parents commented on how excited their children were to participate and how much their reading improved during the very difficult period of lockdown.

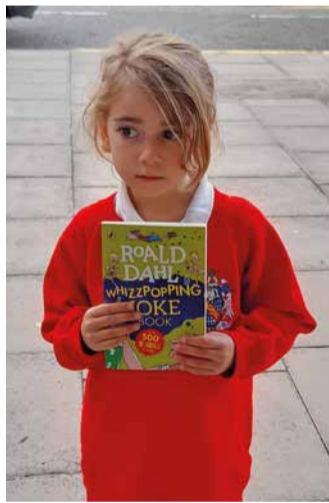
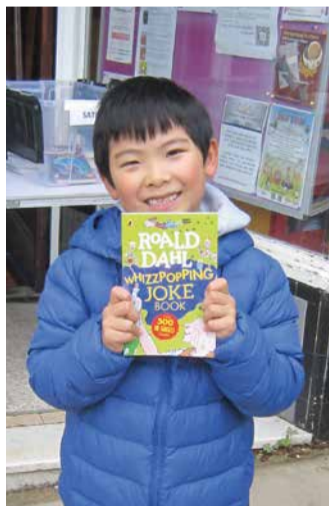
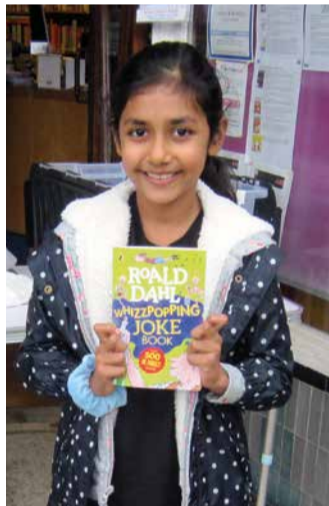
Congratulations to all our worthy winners and we hope to hear a joke next time you come to collect your books!

Please remember that we are still able to open Tuesday –

Saturday from 3pm to 4.30pm for Click & Collect and we also offer a print service.

Full details can be found at: [gardensuburblibrary.org.uk/gscf](http://gardensuburblibrary.org.uk/gscf).

MARC HULL



The ten winners of the HGS Library summer reading challenge, photographed by HGS Library volunteer staff members Hetty Colchester, Marc Hull, Tina Isaacs and Jeremy Clynes.



### Christmas at St Jude's

**Sunday 20 December**  
6pm Carol Service

**Thursday 24 December**  
Christmas Eve  
6pm Carol Service

**Friday 25 December**  
Christmas Day  
10.30am Christmas Celebration

Because of COVID-19 restrictions booking is required for attendance at Christmas services. To request a place contact: [info@stjudeonthehill.com](mailto:info@stjudeonthehill.com)  
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## Look out for your neighbours!

Covid-19 is still with us and so is the 'Look out for your Neighbours' group. If you need help with things like grocery shopping or collecting medicines etc please do not be afraid to ask for support. Just call 020 3322 8123. This number is unmanned but there is a group

of Suburb residents checking it daily and they will find somebody to help you. You may like to cut out and keep the coupon below for easy reference – just in case.

Please remember to look out for your neighbours who may still need some help or just a friendly word.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURS GROUP  
If you cannot get the help you need call

0203 322 8123

Leave a message with your return contact number and one of the HGS 'Look out for your Neighbours' team will call you back.