

# In the bleak midwinter

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

After a period of enforced isolation, Christmas this year will hopefully be a time we can celebrate together. We certainly need an occasion to make merry but recent events such as Covid, the war in Ukraine and the economic situation have cast a long shadow of gloom. Perhaps we should start by taking time to slow down, to reflect and to understand what is really important; also to remember how fortunate we really are. It may be that these reflections and realisations will make us decide that the best way of celebrating Christmas is 'to do good', and to offer hope.

The magi started the tradition of gifts by offering the new born baby gold, frankincense and myrrh. Those gifts had meaning: myrrh being commonly used as an anointing oil, frankincense as a perfume, and gold as a valuable, they also carried spiritual meanings.

Of all the gifts you gave or received last year, how many carried meaning? Perhaps this year you could choose to give the gift of hope to someone by donating to a charity on behalf of a friend or loved one. Charities can organise the giving of a goat,

a pig or six chickens to help a family, (gifts.concern.org.uk) they will administer life-saving jabs for children (Unicef) or install a water pump for a village (Water Aid). You can then give a card, recycled or digital, telling the recipient what you did on their behalf. You could, of course, chose a much more local charity like a food bank or a hospice. If you feel that you would rather gift a physical object you could visit your local charity shop. Your purchase there will help the charity and the planet, an ideal way to recycle.

There is nothing more precious than the gift of time. Rather than

buying a gift, you could assist a friend or a loved one in other ways. You could, for example, help by doing household chores, gardening, running errands, or simply making time to visit and chat.

Christmas is celebrated with gifts but also with a magnificent meal. There is an old Polish tradition which obliges hosts to prepare an extra chair and plate at the table should there be an unexpected visitor. How about bringing this tradition to the 21st century by inviting someone who you know to be alone to join you for your Christmas feast?

A Merry Christmas to us all.



# Hampstead Golf Course

ROSS BIDDISCOMBE

Just over a decade before Henrietta Barnett created Hampstead Garden Suburb, a group of local sports enthusiasts had a different idea for developing the same open space that for centuries had been common-use heathland – they wanted to build a golf course.

They were bankers and stock-brokers, lawyers and solicitors, even the head master of Highgate School, who had taken to the sport which had become known as the Great English Golf Boom. Before, the sport in Britain was confined to Scotland, where the Open Championship had been taking place since 1860.

There were no formal courses in this part of London so, in 1893, they set up Hampstead Golf Club which today lies between four roads in the Suburb – Winnington Road, Ingram Avenue, Neville Drive and Wildwood Road.

There are no records of the original meeting, or who attended (Club records from that period were lost in a fire in 1929), but they negotiated with the Church Commissioners to lease 38 acres of farmland that was part of Spaniard's Farm.

Rooms at the Spaniards Inn were used as a makeshift clubhouse and changing areas, and a Scotsman named James Govan was tempted down from St Andrews to become the first golf professional. Another Scot, Tom Dunn, from a family of golfing royalty in the late 19th century, was engaged to lay out nine holes and, in 1894, the course was playable. The Ham & High reported club activities among the 125 male golfers plus a handful of ladies who were allowed to join as "associates" playing only "on certain days".

The following year was pivotal for the newly formed golf club. The Church Commissioners were keen to make more money from their heathland ownership and offered the golfers another 50 acres to rent, enough for a second nine-holes. The lease would be around £150 per year. Given that there were three recently constructed

golf courses nearby in Finchley, East Finchley and Muswell Hill, no one knew if there were enough local golfers to join Hampstead and fund the course extension. 150 new members were needed but, in the end, the project was rejected and the offer was never made again. Instead, the Church Commissioners looked to property developers for income from their land, while the golfers built a pavilion-style clubhouse for £600 and got on with making the club a success with Hampstead Garden Suburb growing up around them.

The Suburb's growth included the construction of Winnington Road which was set to run through the golf course. So, a new lease was drawn up around 1906 and the original 1st golf hole (the tee was close to Spaniards Inn) and the 2nd were moved to the west of where the road now runs and the rest of the course was re-jigged. As time passed, substantial homes with large gardens were built in the area. Ingram Avenue was added off Winnington Road and, along with The Bishops Avenue, they tip their hat to the church, not only as original owners of the land, but also because the new Bishop of London in 1901 was the Right Reverend Arthur Winnington-Ingram who happened to be a member of Hampstead Golf Club!

In 1929 a clubhouse fire threatened the Club however the insurance money covered the cost of a new building (built in the arts & craft style).

Local members have included the St Trinian's actor of the 1930s, Alistair Sim; one of Britain's most out-spoken Methodist ministers, Lord Soper; and the two-term British Prime Minister Harold Wilson who was a solid 16-handicapper.

And so, the golf club and the Suburb have existed happily side by side for almost 130 years – although club members still wonder how they missed out on that extra nine holes back in 1895.

A book entitled *The History of Hampstead Golf Club 1893-2023* by Ross Biddiscombe will be published early next year.



## CORRECTIONS REGARDING ISSUE 151

Judth Elkan's obituary – was authored by Margaret Harris not Miriam Elkin.  
Church Initiative article – incorrect photo of Friends Meeting House.  
No Streets on the Suburb article – misspelling of Lord Lyttelton.

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