

Stobart – the woman on the black horse

Mabel St Clair Stobart (1862-1954) came to live in Turners Wood when she married barrister John Greenhalgh in 1911. She was a feminist and suffragist who believed that war gave women an opportunity to prove their worth. When the Red Cross refused to allow her freelance Women's Sick and Wounded Convoy Corps to serve in the First Balkan War in 1912 she went anyway, set up a hospital in Thrace and became a Bulgarian heroine.

Two weeks after Britain's entry into the First World War, on 18 August 1914, she set off for Belgium with an all-woman team of nurses and doctors, accompanied by her husband and the vicar of St Jude's, the Reverend Basil Bouchier. The evening before, at a public meeting, she had been handed a cheque for £200, raised from residents of the Suburb and a collection at St Jude's, in support of her work.

Unfortunately, the three Suburb residents arrived in Brussels the day before the Germans marched in. Although they were given safe conduct passes out of the city, all three were subsequently arrested, accused of spying and condemned to be shot at dawn. But then a miracle occurred. Completing the documents which would have formalised his own execution, John Greenhalgh gave his address in Hampstead Garden Suburb. It turned out the interrogating officer had visited the Suburb the previous year on a town-planning study tour. As a result, the 'Suburb three' were released, dined that night with the

German officers, and after a few days in a hotel were on their way to the border.

Undaunted, Mrs Stobart (she used her first husband's name) was back on the continent by the end of the year running an all-women hospital near Cherbourg, and then early in 1915 she was on her way to organise and direct a hospital unit for the Serbian Relief Fund. When the Serbian army was forced to withdraw, she accompanied them on a three-month, 800 mile, fighting retreat through Montenegro and Albania tending the wounded, protecting the many refugees who joined them,



and entering Balkan history as 'the woman on the black horse'.

Her wartime experiences left Mrs Stobart with what she called "a deep craving to find a spiritual antidote to the crude materialism which had been responsible for the horrors." The beautiful services at St Jude's appealed to her aesthetic sense, though she soon found herself at odds with the vicar, her former fellow prisoner Basil Bouchier. She became an early proponent of the ordination of women to the priesthood. When Bouchier argued there were no women clergy in the Bible, Mrs S. countered nor was there any boxing, tennis, or French Riviera (all close to the vicar's heart).

Mrs Stobart moved further from 'crude materialism' having become convinced "of the truth of survival [after death], the existence of a spirit world, and the possibility of communication with that world." She became a leading proponent of Spiritualism and officer of the British College of Psychic Science and turned the subject in to a hot topic on the Suburb in 1924 with lectures and debates at the Institute and St Jude's. Arthur Conan-Doyle was a notable speaker.

Although Mrs Stobart seems to have brought the vicar, originally hostile, to a more open-minded position, she decided to leave St Jude's and establish (with Conan-Doyle) her own 'church' known as The Spiritualist Community.

Mabel Stobart Greenhalgh seems to have left the Suburb after the death of her husband in 1928 and died in a nursing home in Bournemouth in 1954.

THE REV. ALAN WALKER

Profumo – the Fellowship connection



Eileen Whelan and John Profumo playing croquet

Last winter's BBC serial 'The Trial of Christine Keeler', together with the questioning of politicians' honesty, have been reminders that it was time to dust off the 20-year-old photo of John Profumo and Eileen Whelan enjoying a game on Fellowship's croquet lawn.

Visitors to Fellowship House on Willfield Green may have wondered about the copy hanging in the reception area. A 'Sliding Doors' moment: if Christine Keeler hadn't chosen to go swimming at Cliveden on a summer's day in 1961, most likely John Profumo wouldn't have visited our Suburb nearly 40 years later. Behind that visit is the remarkable story of one man's road to redemption – a road that touched the Suburb.

To caricature Profumo as a sharp-suited Lothario is, well, a caricature. There's more to it than that. Education at Harrow then Oxford was followed by a stellar career: youngest MP in the House in 1940, Army officer in the North Africa, Italy and Normandy campaigns, to Brigadier and then a senior staff position in post-war Japan. Back in the UK, he rose to become Minister of War in 1960.

One slip, one lie about an affair led to his resignation in 1963. How quaint compared to ministerial standards today. After his resignation from Government, he never uttered one word publicly about 'The Keeler Interlude'.

That slip however, led to Profumo's full-time voluntary

service for over 40 years at Toynbee Hall. This East End charity, dedicated to tackling poverty, was founded by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett in 1884, long before the Suburb had been thought of. Profumo began his voluntary work at Toynbee Hall shortly after his resignation from Government. He was a talented fundraiser and administrator – ingenious, charismatic and compassionate. One of his early achievements was greatly enhancing the Toynbee Hall Estate, badly damaged in the Blitz. He rose to become Chairman and then President and was

Christine Keeler



awarded the CBE for his charitable activities in 1975.

Toynbee Hall is linked to the Suburb by its co-founder, Henrietta Barnett (what would she have made of Christine?). Today that link is still celebrated, for example, by Suburb residents' large donation made each year via the Proms. Up to about 15 years ago, Toynbee would bring a group of people up from the East End by coach every summer for an afternoon of tea, croquet and entertainment laid on at Fellowship House. Profumo would lead some of these expeditions – hence the photo. Two Suburb residents who helped with the teas back then, Irene Colomb and the late Nancy Gilkes, remembered him as a man of considerable charm.

So, although the Fellowship connection with Profumo arises from a sad background – the bleak life of the much maligned and unfairly prosecuted Christine Keeler and the suicide of Stephen Ward – pride can be taken in the fleeting association with someone whose distinguished public service career was followed by a longer period of inspirational charity work.

Today his picture hangs in Fellowship House, along with those of illustrious chairmen from our charity's post war history – Edward Parry, Eileen Whelan and John Hewson. One wonders if they shouldn't be joined by a portrait of Christine Keeler. After all, no Christine, a less effective Toynbee Hall, a poorer East End – and no croquet with Eileen.

ANDREW BOTTERILL



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