

Suburb resident awarded the Légion d'honneur

COLIN GREGORY

The *Légion d'honneur* was established in 1802 by Napoleon. It is France's highest distinction awarded in recognition of both military and civilian merit. Since 2014, the French government has been awarding the *Légion d'honneur* to D-Day veterans from many different countries as a way of honouring and thanking those who fought and risked their lives to secure France's liberation during the Second World War. Nearly 6,000 medals have been awarded under the scheme.

On the 11 November 2019, 75 years after the end of the Second World War, the French ambassador, Catherine Colonna, presented the award to three Second World War veterans: Jean Neal, a code-breaker at Bletchley Park, William Allen, who served as a guardsman in the Guards Armoured Division of the Coldstream Guards and Keith Whiting, a Royal Marine assigned to HMS Ramillies. The Ambassador thanked them for their sacrifices "at a time when Europe lived its darkest hours, my country was lucky enough to be able to rely on the support of its closest partner, the United Kingdom, as well as on the courage of the British people to defend our common values: liberty, democracy and peace."

Suburb resident and honorary life member of the RA, 98 year old, Jean Neal was working for the civilian Foreign Office group at Bletchley from July 1943 until the end of the war in Europe. In 2008, Jean returned to Bletchley Park with the Hendon and District Archaeological Society. In their newsletter she recalled: "I arrived at Bletchley Park in July 1943, straight from University and without the faintest idea what my war work was going to be. I

began to learn about the Enigma machine, and a fortnight later I started work in Hut 6, dealing with German army codes. My section did the preliminary work on the thousands of coded messages that poured in daily and the brilliant mathematicians in the room next door cracked the codes with astonishing speed, aided by the Turing Bombe, the great computer that filled a room. Social life, for most of us, was almost non-existent. Our friends were as likely as not to be on different shifts, and there were at least ten women to every man, which didn't help. Mostly we went to the cinema. There were five accessible fleapits, all changing programmes mid-week, so there was a fair amount of choice if you weren't too fussy. It was strange to see it again 53 years on but I'm so glad I went."

Bletchley Park is a 19th-century mansion and estate in Milton Keynes that became the principal centre of Allied code-breaking during the Second World War. As Jean Neal recalls, life there was not very comfortable. She was billeted in Wolverton, which she describes as "an unappealing small town some ten miles away, dominated by the railway works and consisting almost entirely of distinctly mean dwellings without bathrooms or indoor lavatories. I was fortunate enough, however, to be billeted in one of the very few modern semis, with a bathroom." With so many people working in the vicinity transport was a major operation. Jean remembers "We were nearly all on shift work (my section worked one week days, one week nights, one week evenings, which meant we never had time to establish a sleep pattern) so the great fleet

of coaches surged through the countryside several times a day, bringing us in, taking us home."

About 8,000 women worked in Bletchley Park, the central site for British cryptanalysts during World War II. Women constituted roughly 75% of the workforce there. While women were overwhelmingly under-represented in high-level work, such as cryptanalysis, they were employed in large numbers in important auxiliary work, such as: operating cryptographic machinery and communications; translating of Axis documents; traffic analysis; clerical duties, and many more besides. According to Sir Harry Hinsley, the "Ultra" intelligence produced at Bletchley Park shortened the duration of the war by approximately two years.

On her first day Jean signed the Official Secrets Act. She was forbidden to say a word about what she did to anyone outside the hut where she worked, so couldn't mention it in the canteen or on the transport, let alone to the world at large. Had the German authorities had the slightest hint of the work going

on there they would have changed their encryption procedures. But Bletchley Park's secrets were so well kept that the only German bombs to hit it, in 1941, were a few randomly jettisoned by a passing bomber. As Jean says: "It really was the Best Kept Secret of the War." Only in 1974 was information about its wartime operations declassified. After its secrets were revealed in the press Jean was finally able to tell Tim, to whom she had been married for many years, what she had done in the War. Her parents never knew.

After receiving the Legion d'honneur, Jean, said "I didn't do anything to deserve it, I just did my job. I haven't had anything from the British government, I can tell you. Not a word from them in the last 50 years!" She added "It's been a lovely experience and I'm extremely glad at my extreme old age to have had it."

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The French Embassy's short video of the ceremony is now available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=j033JilwYc.

What's new in the Virtual Museum

The number of visitors to the HGS Virtual Museum has been going up month by month, as people within the Suburb and way beyond discover the wide range of information that can help them research their family trees, bone up on the history of the place they live in, or study the built environment and the Garden City Movement.

2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the initiation of designated conservation areas in the country. On 20 December 1968, the Suburb itself became a designated conservation area, appropriately enough in the 60th anniversary year of its foundation.

It all started with the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 passed under Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who, with his wife Mary, was a former HGS resident living first at 10 (1948-53) and then 12 Southway (1953-64). The major contribution of this Act was the requirement that all local authorities should designate conservation areas. These were

defined as areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it was desirable to preserve or enhance. Once an area was designated, the local authority was required to pay special attention to such character and appearance by using its powers to make building preservation orders and historic buildings grants.

The idea that Hampstead Garden Suburb should become a conservation area resulted from the determination and influence of a long-standing resident, Mr Leslie Lane, who was the past-president of the Royal town Planning Institute and at the time the director of the Civic Trust and sponsor of the Civic Amenities Bill. The Residents Association organised a meeting at Fellowship House to which some 30 architects and planners were invited, and they decided to form a pressure group to "keep the Suburb beautiful." The rest is history



(Above) Modernist style housing, Vivian Way. (Below) Lutyens' North Square Houses

and you can read all about it by visiting the Virtual Museum at hgsheritage.org.uk/Detail/collections/CA50-1 or by going to hgsheritage.org.uk, and on the Home Page click on What's New.

If you own any Suburb memorabilia that you would like to loan for copying, live in

a house with an interesting history you would like to share, or have knowledge of a particular aspect of Suburb life that you think should be featured in the Virtual Museum, please contact Marjorie Harris at info@hgsheritage.org.uk or ring 020 8455 6507.



TONY BRAND

Halloween! On the 26 October, the Resident's Association once again held their fabulous annual Party for HGS children at Fellowship House. With a spooky story teller, an entertainer and face painter, plus our local Arts and Craft expert, Vera Moore, running a creative art table on the theme, an enjoyable time was had by all present.

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We are Chartered Architects based in North London specialising in refurbishments, extensions and new build houses and flats within conservation areas and to listed buildings.

Events team volunteers needed

The Events Team of the HGS Residents Association is looking for volunteers to join its committee to assist with running various events. These include the annual Summer Fair and New Year's Eve fireworks party, as well as some smaller events during the

year. The committee meets around six times a year in the evening. We also need assistance from people who would like to help run our events but who may not want to be on the main committee.

You don't need any particular skills but just some spare time

and energy to help in a variety of ways in preparing and running these events including setting up on the day. IT skills, including ability to design eye catching posters, would be a bonus!

This is a good way to meet people in the community and

to get involved in making the Suburb a special place to live. Our events are dependent on volunteers if we are going to be able to continue with them.

If interested, please contact the HGSRA's Chair Emma Howard by emailing chair@hgsra.uk.