

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

In recent months it has been hard to ignore the intrusions of the building work into the daily life of the Institute and Henrietta Barnett School. Compressor drills reverberating down corridors and earth movers tipping waste into skips are not easily blotted out of one's consciousness; and there is a need for considerable care when using temporary scaffold board footpaths, lest one steps off them inadvertently into the quagmire below. Nobody, of course, expects a major building site to be either clean or silent, and on the whole the occupants of the Institute have shown admirable tolerance and a determination to ensure that business continues as usual.

Such fortitude is not particularly surprising. Adult education has a long tradition of 'making the best of things'. It does not, generally, take

place in modern, purpose-built accommodation—indeed it frequently happens in downright difficult circumstances—yet there is often, among the staff and students involved, an enthusiasm for their course and for each other's company that transcends the problems.

The Institute, thankfully, has more than its fair share of these enthusiasts. They deserve a working environment that enables them to explore and develop their ideas and interests to the full, just as the girls at the school deserve conditions which give them the best possible chance to enhance their future prospects.

We hope that when the various phases of the building work have been completed all the users of the Institute will agree that the results were worth waiting for. RB



## PROVERBS 29xviii

Present day society does not lay down roots as former generations did. Opportunities exist to move around in the world of industry, commerce, education and individual enterprise. In later life people are more realistic and move on when the family have grown up, rather than struggle on in large houses that they can no longer physically or financially maintain. Attitudes and values change.

This continuing movement of the population tends to detract from the community element within a neighbourhood especially when there is no focal point. Here within this Suburb there is a focal point, **The Institute**, founded in 1909 to provide a centre for the community for educational, cultural and social activities. The

community and The Institute are interdependent, therefore The Institute to fulfil its duties must have the support of the community.

The community can best help through The Institute Society which assists in the running of The Institute; three members of its committee serve on The Institute Council. The Society invites residents who feel a responsibility towards the community to apply for membership. Telephone **The Institute** on 455 9951 or call in at the office for a membership form. The Society looks forward to welcoming you as a new member and wishes to thank present members for their continued support. Life is about people, but where there is no vision the people perish. JB

## ST JUDE'S IS 75

St. Jude's church was consecrated on 7th May 1911 by the Bishop of London. It had as yet no tower or spire: these were completed in 1913. In the spire is sealed, with portraits of himself and his wife, a message from Cannon Barnett which quaintly reflects some of today's fears and preoccupations:

"This tower with its spire, finished in 1913, has been built during a period of unrest... in the older Nations the fear of war has dominated politics; and here in England the movements of workmen and women are threatening the accustomed order of society."

Lutyens was caustic about Dame Henrietta's lack of architectural vision: "No idea of much beyond a

window box full of geraniums, calceolarias and lobelias, over which you can see a goose on the green". But on the site of St. Jude's and Central Square they shared ambitious aspirations. A church, he later quoted approvingly, should be "a gathering up of all that men can do... It has fifty roofs, it has a gigantic signal tower, it has blank walls like precipices, and round arch after round arch... it conquers the site upon which it stands".

Professor Pevsner regards St. Jude's as Lutyens' tour de force. Despite his differences with Dame Henrietta about its height and cost, all his preliminary sketches and designs share a soaring spire. Even today it is not hard to imagine the

way St. Jude's must have looked in its early years, still virtually surrounded by fields. It dominates the view from every angle: to the south from the top of the Heath Extension; from the Staples Corner flyover in the west; from the north as you leave the M1; and from the Lytton Playing Fields and the rising ground to the east of Falloden Way.

Residents of the Suburb are of many different religions and of none; but as a social and architectural focus St. Jude's has a general significance. It is "The Heart of the Suburb", the title of a lecture to be given in the church by Dr Mervyn Miller on 6th May, when St. Jude's will be starting a week of anniversary celebrations. There will be a Thanksgiving service in the church on 7th May to which the Mayor of Barnet, Peter Thomas MP, local clergy and councillors are

being invited. Then on Saturday, 10th May an "Edwardian Afternoon" should have something of interest for everyone. There will be a performance of "Noah's Flood" adapted from the Chester miracle plays; a new film about the Suburb made by John Seymour; teas, music, craft demonstrations and croquet on the lawn. Residents are invited to come in Edwardian dress, and you can have your photograph taken in your costume. There will be a prize for the most fetching hat. Over the weekend there will be an exhibition of archives and vestments. DW

# To Repoint or not to Repoint, that is the question

This article begins with an official Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust Health Warning:

**Repointing can seriously damage your house (and your pocket).**

Why does the Trust say this? Surveyors often recommend repointing when they survey a building for a prospective purchaser. The householder finds that he can poke out the mortar with a stick or even his finger and so he feels that the brickwork must be weak or cannot be watertight. Or perhaps he thinks that to repoint will make his house look smart and new. Or it may be that a jobbing builder knocked on the door and said "I see your house needs repointing, Guv."

One of the great glories of the Suburb is the consistent high quality of the brickwork. For a start, fine handmade bricks were used almost always, and they were well laid by competent workmen. These bricks are full of subtle colour and this is not impaired by the original mortar in its rather narrow joints. The mortar used was basically lime and sand, with perhaps a certain admixture of Portland cement or brickdust. The mortar in the joints was often simply cut off, or if it was smoothed with a trowel the passage of time has eroded the joint by a few millimetres to give the effect that we now see. The appearance is just right.

### The advantages of lime mortar

All buildings move to some degree because of the effect of heat and cold, wetness and dryness, and many houses here are on shallow foundations and this may give rise to movement too. Lime mortar is slightly flexible. Even if hair cracks do form, lime is self-healing and the action of the rain will seal them up again. The lime also helps to give a good colour to the mortar, but more will be said about this later. The surface will weather slightly and have an open texture. This helps the brickwork dry out after rain. Because the mortar is weaker than the bricks it reduces the danger of frost spalling off the faces of the brick. Finally the original lime mortar is homogeneous through the joint and therefore less likely to break away. The moral is **DO NOT REPOINT UNLESS IT IS ESSENTIAL AND SEEK IMPARTIAL ADVICE FIRST.**

### Why do people advise repointing?

The casual jobbing builder will advise repointing because he is looking for work and hopes to get it from you. He cannot be regarded as an impartial adviser. The Government's recent housing improvement schemes included repointing among the items which qualify for grants, but these "improvements" also included the ruination of terrace houses by the substitution of different window shapes and types and so cannot be regarded as architecturally sound and I would question whether the scheme was technically sound, however admirable in its intent. The surveyor advises repointing for a different and more subtle reason. When a prospective purchaser asks a surveyor for a report on a house he is thinking of buying it is vital that the surveyor lists everything that needs or may need doing to the house. If he fails to list something he is liable to be accused of professional negligence. He therefore tends to list a number of items (rod drains, test electrical installation, repoint) virtually as a matter of course. It is prudent for him to do so, indeed he cannot go wrong by so doing. If the repointing is done and in fact does not improve the house he can always argue that it was not done properly. But if he does not list repointing and some mortar falls out after five years, some owners will seek financial redress from their professional adviser (even if the real problem was that they themselves had not cleaned the leaves out of the gutter so that it overflowed

## IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING APPLICATIONS FOR TRUST CONSENT

This year the Trust Architect is being allowed to have a summer holiday and he will be away for three weeks in August. There will be no processing of Applications for Trust Consent during August and so any applications which are in progress at that time will be delayed by a month. The Trust Architect will not be available for consultation during August. Please allow for this in making your plans for any building or alteration work.

continually). You will note that although I believe that surveyors often advise repointing unnecessarily I am not blaming them for the situation.

### When is repointing necessary?

The answer to this is "very rarely." There are very few houses in the Suburb where the mortar of general walling has eroded to such a degree that appearance, weathertightness or structural stability dictate repointing. However chimneys, because of their exposed position, and parapets or brick mullions may well require attention after about fifty years, and if rainwater pipes have been leaking for a number of years the pointing will probably be affected locally. But it is impossible to argue from the general to the particular case of your house, so seek advice from the Trust.

### How do we repoint?

If it is agreed that repointing, either local or general, is advisable the aim must be to do a job which will be sound, and will not impair the appearance of the house. This is very difficult to achieve, and many a house has been spoilt in appearance by repointing. Others give rise to technical problems after a few years, by which time the builder may have disappeared into oblivion. This is not a treatise on repointing. Cases vary, and in the end the work is done by a man with a trowel, so the Trust Architect will speak to him personally in the hope that this will produce the right result. Even so, it must be obvious that the Trust is not in a position to guarantee a successful job, and does not accept liability for the outcome, which is beyond its control.

It is first of all necessary to rake out the old mortar sufficiently far back to give a good key to the new mortar. Old lime mortar is very dusty, so it must be a clean square rake back to a depth twice the width

of the joint. Note that the term is "rake out". This means work by hand, using a hooked tool. It is tedious work, and the temptation is to use a hammer and chisel or bolster, or worse still an electric disc cutter. This only results in chipped bricks and widened joints and such damage is permanent and cannot be repaired. If the mortar cannot be raked out by hand it does not need repointing. The suction of the brickwork is adjusted prior to repointing by wetting.

However, at an early stage experiments should have been going on to get a suitable mix for repointing. The ingredients have to be mixed very carefully and proportions recorded so that the best mix can be consistently reproduced for the work. For the experiments use yoghurt tubs! The old "hydraulic limes" are for practical purposes not available nowadays, and so the mortar mix will contain non-hydraulic lime and some Portland cement and sand. Ordinary Portland cement has a very dead grey colour which can kill the colour in the bricks stone-dead. White Portland cement is available, but is very white and glaring. Sand varies a great deal in colour and character from different pits. Too fine and soft a sand, in conjunction with cement, will produce a harsh shiny joint which is far too obtrusive. Some sharp sand is required as well to open up the texture. Not too much however or the mortar will fall off the trowel before the bricklayer can put it in the joint. There are many variables and so experiments have to be made, and one does not know the outcome until the mortar has dried out. Finally it is possible and is often appropriate to add a small quantity of pigment in order to soften the colour of the new mortar during the first few years until natural weathering takes effect.

The mortar is put into the joint with a trowel in the usual way, taking great care to keep the face of the brickwork clean. At the appropriate time in the setting process it should be brushed, wiped with a coarse cloth, scraped with a stick or whatever, to seal the mortar back against the brickwork, to recess the joint very slightly (to give a narrow appearance and to make the pointing less aggressive) and to open up the texture of the mortar.

### Popular misconceptions

\* The purpose of mortar is to hold the bricks together. Wrong: its purpose is to hold the bricks apart.

\* Cement is better than lime. Wrong: lime resists cracking and is self-healing, while cement shrinks and is prone to cracking and will never heal.

\* Strong mortar is better than weak mortar. Wrong: indeed the mortar should always be weaker than the bricks, and some of the red bricks used in the Suburb are quite weak. Soft mortar encourages the drying-out of a wall through the joints and makes the bricks less liable to frost damage.

\* Impermeable bricks and mortar make a weathertight wall. Wrong: the soundest wall is one where the bricks absorb the rain and allow it to dry out freely after the rain. An impermeable wall causes sheets of water to flow down it, and this water will really penetrate where there is any crack or imperfection, and every building has those somewhere.

\* No Consent is needed for repointing. Wrong: Trust Consent is needed because pointing done wrongly will materially alter the appearance of the building. The concern of the Trust is that the right decisions should be taken and this impartial advice is given without charge. Permission may be needed from Barnet also, particularly in the case of Listed Buildings. W R C



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