

TIMES PAST

Early Years on the Suburb

When my parents rented a seven-bedroomed house in Reynolds Close in 1910 it wasn't quite finished, so they were able to ask for a second bathroom for the children and the maids. This took a slice off our attic nursery. The pavement wasn't ready either and our nanny had to manoeuvre a huge pram along a series of planks. I was only two years old on arrival so my memories are rather misty or based on hearsay, but I have a distinct picture of a sort of corral of nannies on camp-stools with their knitting, and prams with babies and toddlers running round on that bit of the Heath Extension between Reynolds Close and Heath Close near the big oak trees and the horse ride. I wandered off and got terrifyingly stuck in a deep clay hoofprint as the ride was not covered in sand at the start. This led to the site being abandoned with much clucking and tut-tutting from the nannies. Another terror was Wildwood Road. Anything could happen with such a name, and I clung tightly to the handle of the pram when the regulation afternoon walk took us in that direction.

One more brilliant vignette stays in my memory. Across the road in Hampstead Way by Heath Close I suddenly saw a crocodile of little girls trotting along, all wearing red coats. I could not take my eyes off them and got dragged along backwards holding on to the pram. Years later I found they had come from the Council Home in Homesfield, next door to the Waifs and Strays, now Abbeyfield. The matron told me that when they stopped supplying the old women in the cook-house with red flannel petticoats, the surplus material was used to make coats for the orphans.

While the Suburb was a-building, a small railway was laid down to circulate materials with a proper little engine, stationed off Central Square, and one of my hearsay stories was of my seven-year-old elder brother, allowed to roam free of Nanny's jurisdiction, managing to start it up.

One more story that I found impressive was about my mother being so very critically ill when my youngest brother was born that straw was put down in the road to deaden the clip-clop of tradesmen's horses and the hansom cabs from the yard at Golders Green station, and a



Reynolds Close in 1912

retired judge living in Reynolds Close went round in person tying up all the gates.

The beginning of World War I made a great change in our life-style. All round, nannies and cooks and parlour-maids were replaced by mother's helps and cook-generals. Our mother's help was a vicar's daughter from Devon who had a friend who was Dame Henrietta Barnett's secretary, so in spite of our clamour to get playing on what we called 'The Seats' at the bottom of Heathgate, we were often parked outside St Jude's while she went into the house on the corner of South Square for a chat.

Sometimes we were tucked up for the night under the dining-room table because of the air-raids. We watched the first daylight raid on London from the

safety of the drawing-room bay-window. I thought it looked like wasps in the sky. On the night the Zeppelin was shot down we were taken out to join the crowds watching in the road. The spectacle had us painting pictures of it for days afterwards, always with a German falling out, much to my mother's distress. We were completely callous about this, but when I heard about people smashing the windows of a German baker's shop in Golders Green I was terribly upset at such violent cruelty.

We went to school at what was just called The Institute in those days and wore a rather unbecoming uniform of scarlet tunics, with red jerseys for the boys. Expansion was already needed. There was only the one main building, plus a charming one-storey kindergarten house

and a collection of wooden huts. Sitting at a little desk at the back of the big hall I saw the great Mrs Barnett passing by on a visit to the school: to my eyes, just an insignificant-looking old lady in flowing black garments. For another term, my classroom was on the stage, and then crammed into a corner of the library upstairs.

One of my stirring memories was of the 1918 Armistice. During the morning break, we were playing wild games outside when guns were heard and a little boy called Ernest (one of those know-all little boys) yelled, 'It's the Peace! The Peace!', and we immediately became a mob of shrieking hysterical children. The headmistress (Miss Davis, I think) rushed out and herded us all into the hall to sing God Save the King. As well as a patriotic outburst, this was a practice for when Queen Mary came to lay the foundation stone for the central building. On the great day of the Royal visit, my youngest brother got a special smile as, surrounded by curtsying little girls, he clutched his shorts and tried to copy them.

With the end of the war came the beggars. Pathetic figures were lined up at intervals all along Rotherwick Road hoping to touch the hearts of people coming home from the shops in Golders Green. Once my mother

sent my eldest brother back with one of those earthenware jam-jars we used to have, filled with hot soup. Giving an account of expenditure on shopping errands ended up with 'and a penny for a poor man'.

Barrel-organs were a source of entertainment. We loved the cheerful raucous music.

The first car to be seen in Reynolds Close caused perpetual excitement. We called it the Whizz Bang and were allowed to leave the breakfast table and rush up to the gate to see it go by taking its owner (an Air Force officer) to work each morning.

As children, we were positively tribal in our attitudes. The Reynolds Close lot were allies with Heath Close and our stretch of Hampstead Way, but further afield there were enemies, specially 'the garage kids' from the chauffeurs' flats in Corringway, subsequently put out of bounds. My brothers were thrilled with the rumours that in Erskine Hill lurked boys who fought with knives.

The Heath was the great backdrop to our lives with its series of lovely ponds with dragonflies and bulrushes and minnows for the boys to catch with bent pins on bits of string, and the Keepers with their shiny brown gaiters trying to stop us climbing trees. During the war, hay-making and then a flock of sheep were added to our joys. For refreshments, there was the Italian ice-cream man with about ten children, installed in the Keepers' store-sheds.

Then we had Turners Wood, chopped down to make way for Winton Road, I think. It was very dense; tall trees and shoulder-high bracken fenced in with high iron railings. A deserter hid in it successfully for a fortnight. People in the big houses at the far end of Wildwood Road had keys to the gates. (At an exhibition, I saw an early map of the Suburb where the Dame had written: 'Here the rich can build their houses'.) We had friends here, but soon found bent railings to squeeze through and dispensed with the key.

Bunkers Hill was not yet built over and proved splendid for tobogganing in the snow.

Marion Berry

MARGARET GLASER

Many people in the Suburb were saddened by the death on 28 July of Margaret Glaser. It was typical of her that she should request that her funeral should be a cheerful occasion. The chapel, crowded with family and friends, reflected the vitality and breadth of her contribution to Suburb life. To those who knew her, it seemed that the dignity and interest in life that she sustained during the last few months were a miracle of self-discipline fuelled, as always, by a temperament that somehow managed to combine great practicality with artistic flair.

Brought up in Chiswick and Kew, Margaret moved to Kingsley Way during her marriage to Paul Glaser which, sadly, ended with his early death in 1966. Motherhood did not always come easily to her although her three children were a constant source of interest and, despite admitted moments of puzzlement, of deep joy. She loved her two grandchildren and appreciated her good fortune in having all her family in or near London during her later years in Erskine Hill.

Four years after her husband's death she joined the staff of the Society of Friends in Euston Road as a secretary to Leslie Smith, who ran the Quaker Social Responsibility and Education programme. She stayed until 1986, making lasting friendships and enjoying the new commitment. At the same time, with her children growing up, she began the contribution to Suburb life which was so enriching to herself and to the local community. Because she did what she did in an unassuming way, the extent of this contribution was evident only to those in immediate contact. She is greatly missed at Fellowship House where, as one member of the Croquet Group put it, 'she was a star', taking herself off to croquet courses in order to become more expert as both player and tutor, cooking savoury dishes for the Tuesday Lunch Club, organising one of the tea rotas, and playing classical music recordings for members. Never

one to seek the limelight, she was for many years a practical and utterly reliable presence in many Suburb societies and charities. She represented Erskine Ward in the Residents Association, and the North London Hospice, Friends of the Earth and Oxfam had cause to be grateful for her selfless interest.

A green-fingered gardener who was rarely at a loss for a botanical name, she was for many years a stalwart of the Horticultural Society, both as a committee member and a supporter of the shows, where her regular prize-winning presentations of plants and creative dishes - always shared with friends afterwards - drew admiring comments. Her input to the shows, and her attempts to persuade as many members as possible to follow her example, illustrated her deep conviction that one must give to the utmost. Up to the last months of her life she helped to maintain the beauty of Abbeyfield's garden. In the Gourmet Society, she was a creator as well as a receiver of hospitality. She always loved food and cooking, presenting everything she did with great delicacy.

Her private life was greatly enriched by her artistic leanings. A talented calligrapher, she also gained great personal satisfaction from both listening to music and reading. Her love of wildlife brought her much joy in her final weeks when, as she became more confined, she could watch the birds in her garden. It was Margaret who, a year or two ago, sparked off a correspondence in *Suburb News* over species of birds in local gardens. Having identified twenty-six in her own garden, she was anxious to find out if others could increase the tally. As Ann Ord of the Society of Friends said of her: 'Everything she did, she shared.'

She would have wished for no pompous memorial, but it would have pleased her to think that, in all her activities, others were ensuring that the good work went on.

Margaret Cox

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