

"An ideal place to bring up children" Martin Bell

It was a vast and ancient oak that brought Martin Bell to the Suburb. Needing to move his family from a small Hampstead flat in 1974, he heard of an 'artisan's cottage' for sale in Denman Drive - standing, as it were, in the grounds of the great tree - and instantly bought it, for the tree.

The Suburb, he says, was an ideal place in which to bring up children (two daughters, now pursuing careers elsewhere), and is delighted that it remains so, with more young families moving in these days. He welcomes neighbouring children who creep through his high hedges - 100 feet of them which, until recently, he clipped himself - into the wilderness end of his pretty garden, beyond the 90-year-old apple tree which, as in the garden of every artisan's cottage, Henrietta Barnett had had planted as part of her utopian plans for Suburb life. He praises the Trust highly for its 'magnificent work in holding the line' and keeping the Suburb unchanged, apple trees and all.

For Martin himself, who was already making a name reporting wars for BBC television, the Suburb was to become a very special place, a tranquil haven after long stints among the noise and danger of innumerable unquiet areas of the world. Returning to it after months in some hotel close to a front line where night-long bombing was routine, he would find the silence so unaccustomed that at first he could not sleep through it. The biggest effect, he says, of his war experiences has been to give him a vivid appreciation of the tranquillity most residents take for granted; 'Peace is a privilege.'

During his quarter-century here, honour after honour has been awarded to him - four honorary doctorates, the OBE, Reporter of the Year award 1977 (for his coverage of the British mercenaries' trial in Angola) and TV Journalist of the Year award 1992 (for his Bosnia reports). His account of his Bosnian war experiences, 'In Harm's Way' has been a best-seller. Just as meaningful to him are the enduring friendships he has made wherever he went among ordinary people on both sides of any conflict (there is a constant flow of both Croat and Serb visitors to his cottage here).

Since becoming MP for Tatton in Cheshire, Martin has rented another 'artisan's cottage' up there to which he goes from Thursday to Sunday as a rule. It's a demanding life - leaving no time for his favourite pursuits of cookery and swimming at the Cophall centre - for even though, as an independent MP, he has no Chief Whip breathing down his neck, he works till 10pm nearly every evening.

Being a celebrity brings him about a hundred letters a day (often from people whose own Party MP has been unable to solve their problem).

He enjoys the work, and has a unique knowledge of military affairs to contribute to parliamentary debates, but is adamant that he will not stand again. Instead, another book (already entitled 'An Accidental MP') is in the pipeline and it is likely that he will be making many television documentaries in years to come.

The Suburb was especially privileged to hear him talk on his parliamentary experiences on 29 June (for he refuses all other speaking engagements outside his own constituency) and to have him as Patron of the Suburb's current fund-raising campaign for Toynbee Hall.

ELIZABETH GUNDREY

Twenty three years of the FHA fetes



Joan Laurance MBE and Pat at their final fete?

Joan and Pat Laurance founded the Family Holiday Association in 1975 to provide holidays, often for the first time, for disadvantaged families. The following year, Joan Laurance approached the families in Hill Close to see if they would surrender their front gardens for a fete - they would. In the first year, the fete raised £750. This year, combined with an auction, it was £9,200.

Soon the fete spread into some back gardens too, with stalls and a steel band at the front and games and food and hordes of kids at enjoying themselves at the back.

Opened by celebrities, including Prunella Scales and Timothy West, Michael Palin, Esther Rantzen and Andrew Sachs, the fete had become a Suburb event, eagerly awaited for its fun and fine weather. Growing larger still, with about 150 volunteers each year, it moved up the steps and on to the square (and into St Jude's Church Rooms, packed tight when the weather was poor).

Meanwhile, the FHA had become an established charity with an office and has funded over 1,000 family holidays a year.

This year, Joan and Pat with an impressive combined age of 155, announced that they were definitely retiring and through want of Suburb successors to take over the organising effort, this was indeed the last fete. The Laurances are 'tremendously grateful for all the wonderful support the Suburb has given us over the last twenty years, regardless of the weather' and they add that the FHA will still be fund-raising in North West London (for example at local



The 1985 Fete in Hill Close

festivals). Volunteers who can spare a couple of hours will be welcomed on 0181-455 1777. Additionally, this year, the FHA office organised a charity auction at the Institute which raised £3,200, and plan to bring back another auction, possibly in September 1999.

Suburb residents will feel a real debt of gratitude for the success of the Laurances' initiative. Will the Suburb succeed in setting up a summer fete to take the place of the FHA fete, perhaps twinned with the Institute's Open Days? Time will tell.

SIMON ABBOTT



And, above, in 1978

Right: Suburb News issue No.1 reports on the 1983 FHA Fete with Timothy West helping to raise money for the FHA.

HILL CLOSE FETE TIMOTHY WEST HELPS RAISE £4,300 FOR F.H.A.



Almost the only hot day in a very damp May was chosen by Joan and Pat Laurance for one of the Suburb's most popular annual events, the Hill Close Fete. The day close was thronged with residents enjoying the sunshine and the stalls, raising £4,300 for the Family Holiday Association.

The charity was founded by Patrick and Joan Laurance in 1975 to provide a week's holiday for families living on low incomes, even with many other family holiday options. The charity's programme of the association which is now spread throughout the UK on the only charity specializing in this particular field. In 1975, 11 British families were given holiday grants to the value of £12.11. The average holiday grant has now risen to £15.11. The average holiday grant is now £15.11. The average holiday grant is now £15.11.

Applications are received from the far North of Scotland to Cornwall and the map in their office, full of spare bedrooms is covered with the pins representing an area from which applications have been received.

For the first six years Patrick and Joan coped with all the office work on their own but the volume of work now necessitates a part-time administrator. However the administration costs amount to less than 10% of their total income.

Fund raising is a non-stop process, appeals to trusts and firms and a variety of fund raising events many of which are striking for their originality. An evening's dining at Dunsstable, a C&A-

Patrick and Joan with their grandson, Barney. (Clockwise from top left) Timothy West, Joan Laurance, and other attendees at the fete.

Hedda Gabler

Ibsen wrote very detailed stage instructions about what the stage setting should convey, what clothes his characters should wear and what they themselves looked like. Thus we know that George Tesman is "rather stout with a round cheerful face" - "somewhat carelessly dressed in comfortable indoor clothes". And that "Hedda's face and figure show refinement and that her hair is not abundant". Mrs Elvsted's hair on the other hand is "very fair and unusually abundant".

These points are important indicators of character. Hedda knew Thea Elvsted at school and often threatened to burn that beautiful hair. Now she has more cause for jealousy since Thea has had the courage to leave her husband and children to follow Lovborg to town. Not only that but she has reformed his wild erratic behaviour and helped him write a book which will put Tesman's own work in the shade and threaten his prospects.

The main problem with the HGS Theatre's production of 'Hedda Gabler' was the miscasting. Colin Gregory, good actor that he is, could not convey the good humoured, dithering, but

not foolish, Tesman. Declan Leary's Lovborg was dull and failed to show any trace of the man who revealed to Hedda the wilder side of life before her 'safe' marriage. Even Liz Amiel failed to find the tragic flaw in Hedda's character - her fear of the unconventional which made her reject Lovborg and trapped her into marriage with Tesman. Her Hedda was very statuesque but there was no real passion, as for instance when she burns the manuscript which she calls Lovborg's and Thea's 'child'.

With Judge Brack (Fred Griessen) who was not sinister or compelling enough, one of the motives for Hedda's suicide was obscured. Lovborg failed to die with 'vine leaves in his hair' and Brack now has the upper hand with Hedda's pistol in his possession. She will not be subject to his demands or watch her husband and Thea bring to life the literary 'child'. There is no other way.

It must be difficult for an amateur group to find the ideal cast and under the circumstances the director, John Woolf, and the actors presented a brave attempt at a great and complex play.

LEONIE STEPHEN

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