

## The vision of the Barnetts

In these days of 'dumbing down' it is refreshing to go back to the Barnetts' views on culture and education. At Toynbee Hall and then in the Suburb, they were determined to provide the best for all classes of people - the best of music, art, literature and political debate.

In the 1870s when the Barnetts came to Whitechapel, they were appalled by the dirt and poverty around them, but they were perhaps even more distressed by the ignorance and narrow range of enjoyments of East Enders and they made practical efforts to introduce cultural experiences. They persuaded West End choirs and famous soloists, such as Clara Butt, to sing the Messiah, Elijah and other oratorios in St Jude's, Whitechapel. At Toynbee there were classical concerts on Sunday afternoons. In the summer there were band concerts in the quad. In the Suburb, the Institute was founded to carry out the same cultural role.

Henrietta hoped to have a really first rate Music School at the Institute and persuaded Sir Henry Wood to be the President. Rosabel Watson from Toynbee was Principal, and there was an ambitious programme for concerts, teaching instruments and musical appreciation.

Picture Shows were held for three weeks every Easter in the dreary old school rooms behind St Jude's vicarage in Whitechapel. Paintings were borrowed from

artists and owners. There were abundant contemporary works which could be easily understood by Whitechapel people - Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World', Watts' 'Spirit of the Ages', Millais' Portrait of Gladstone, Burne-Jones' 'The Golden Stairs'. Canon Barnett used to spend five or six hours at a time expounding the meaning of paintings to rapt audiences, which included all classes of people - The Barnetts' great hope was to mix the classes and that working men and women would enjoy high culture. The Sunday Observance Society disapproved of the Sunday opening of the Exhibition, but the Barnetts knew that people working long hours, usually including Saturdays, were free to come only on Sundays. Moreover, though East Enders were much more easily drawn into the Exhibitions than to church services, the Barnetts believed that cultural experience would awaken a spirituality which would work in favour of religion. The Exhibitions in the old rooms drew such crowds of people and such acclaim that after twenty years money was raised to build the Whitechapel Art Gallery, opened in 1901.

George Watts was a particular friend of the Barnetts. He painted a portrait of Samuel Barnett, now in the Watts museum at Compton in Surrey. In the early days of the Institute

there were three paintings by Watts hanging in the Hall.

There were University Extension Classes and numerous societies at Toynbee as there have been subsequently on the Suburb. The Smoking Debates at Toynbee attracted big audiences of working men (women were put off by the smoke) to hear famous and controversial speakers: Asquith on the House of Lords, Balfour on Leasehold Enfranchisement, Herbert Samuel on Liberalism and Social Reform, Buxton on the Macedonian Question (have we ever solved any problems?). Bernard Shaw spoke on the proposal "That the Working Classes are Useless, Dangerous, and ought to be Abolished".

The Barnetts had aesthetic as well as religious certainties. For them a painting was more important for its moral meaning - indeed Samuel Barnett was colour blind! They were confident that the aesthetic experiences they themselves enjoyed would enlarge the lives of all the people. The experience must be of the best....Once when Henrietta visited a rich lady to borrow pictures for the Picture Show, the lady indicated some minor works as suitable for the poor, but after Henrietta had spent several hours talking to her she lent the best pictures in her collection. She had been persuaded that what was needed was 'the best for the worst'.

MICKY WATKINS

## 1999 - 175 years of Lifeboats

TV Personality Katie Boyle with some committee members of the HGS Branch of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution launch 175 years of saving lives at sea.

London Flag Week in 1999 is 1st - 9th March. During that time our collectors will be outside Temple Fortune supermarkets, and in Brent Cross Shopping Centre.

If you feel able to help this wonderful charity, please phone Flag Week Secretary Ann Donohoe on 0181-455 7683.



## Seasonal Fair at Suburb schools

On Friday, December 11th the PTA of the Garden Suburb Infant and Junior schools held their Seasonal Fair for the children of both infant and junior schools. Each year the fair is eagerly awaited by the children of both schools. It gives them a splendid opportunity to buy presents for their relatives and loved ones. All gifts are made and donated by the parents and the proceeds of the sale go towards the school funds. This year the fair raised £806.20 for the Infant school and £1076.94 for the Junior school.



## Pretty in Pink

Does your child like to dress up in pink and frilly clothes and pirouette around your living room? Then they might like to join the small dance group recently set up in the Suburb. The 'Garden Suburb Dance Club' has been set up by two local mothers after their daughters' ballet class closed down at short notice. Operating on a non-profit-making basis, the group aims to teach the children basic dance skills together with an enjoyment of music and creative

movement. Meeting on Wednesday afternoons, it is a lively and sociable group, catering for the 5 to 7 years age group. If your

child would like to join us, you can contact either Irene Sowerbutts on 455 7235 or Karen Grant on 458 2838.



## Suburb's £14,000 for Toynbee Hall

There was a very happy atmosphere at the celebratory presentation at Toynbee Hall on 1 December, with a good attendance from those who had supported the 1998 appeal run by the Dame Henrietta Barnett Fund; some £14,000 had been raised (£5,000 from just three residents, the rest from others and from 16 fund-raising events initiated by the RA's Events Committee).

The cheque, presented by the appeal's patron, Martin Bell MP, will go to help various aspects of Toynbee youth work

in the East End, in line with the work first done there by Henrietta and Samuel Barnett. A contribution will be made to employing a senior youth worker because of the ever-increasing importance of helping and guiding children and young people in this area of exceptional deprivation. Then there are youth-club nights to be financed: £50 each is all that it takes to provide four hours' healthy recreation for up to 40 youths, every Saturday night. Because of the large immigrant community,

A-level support classes in Bengali every Saturday afternoon are to be provided for students. And there will be a contribution, too, to the cost of accommodating a young graduate from Balliol College who is gaining youth work experience at Toynbee. The slogan of the Dame Henrietta Barnett Fund is 'Through education, out of poverty' and every pound raised will further that end.

The evening included music and songs from Bangladesh and an outstanding cordon bleu buffet produced by the Events Committee's new Chairman, Samantha Ambrose, and her colleagues.

ELIZABETH GUNDREY

## Good with figures?

The RA is looking for two people to help keep our accounts in order. One will look after all our income and expenditure and the other to keep the Garden Suburb Gallery accounts. Please contact the treasurer, Alan Brudney, 16 Temple Fortune Hill, 458 4170.

## Associate Members

Friends of the Suburb, who may have moved away but want to keep in touch or who live nearby, are welcome to join the Residents Association as Associate Members.

The only difference between member and associate is that associates have no voting powers. For a minimum suggested £6 a

year associates can receive by post 4 issues of Suburb News plus, currently, 8 issues of Whats On in the Suburb as well as the RA's Annual Report and a Suburb Directory as they are published.

Associates can also join the RA's Theatre Club.

Please enrol me/us as an Associate Member for 1999

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque for £ \_\_\_\_\_ (Minimum £6, more welcome)

I do/do not/require a receipt. I do/do not/need Whats On every month

Please post to:

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