LETTERS (continued)

80 Willifield Way, NW11 6YJ

Sir,

I write to express my dismay at the tone of Mr Saddiek Meer's letter in the last issue of Suburb News. It is one thing to disagree with another person's views, but to call them 'ignorant', 'anti-environmental' etcetera is both extremely rude and unnecessary.

It is particularly reprehensible in this case as Diane Berger epitomises the spirit of good neighbourliness which is supposed to be inherent in the ideals of the Suburb and the Residents Association. Diane gives freely of her time to contribute the gardening article, which I for one find most helpful. Perhaps even more importantly, she is a 'neighbour from heaven' to all the elderly folk around her.

Yours
Clarice Been

Elijah at St Jude's

Tickets were sold out for Mendelssohn's Elijah in St Jude's when the Alyth Choral Society, the Eascote Choral Society with members of the choirs of the Free Church and St Jude's gave a memorable performance on March 21. Rev Alan Walker welcomed the Mayor of Barnet and soloists were Helen Attfield - contralto, Vivienne Bellos - soprano, Anthony Caplan - tenor and Jonathan Prentice - baritone. Here Helen Attfield and Vivienne Bellos receive plaudits and bouquets.

A sundial for the Millennium

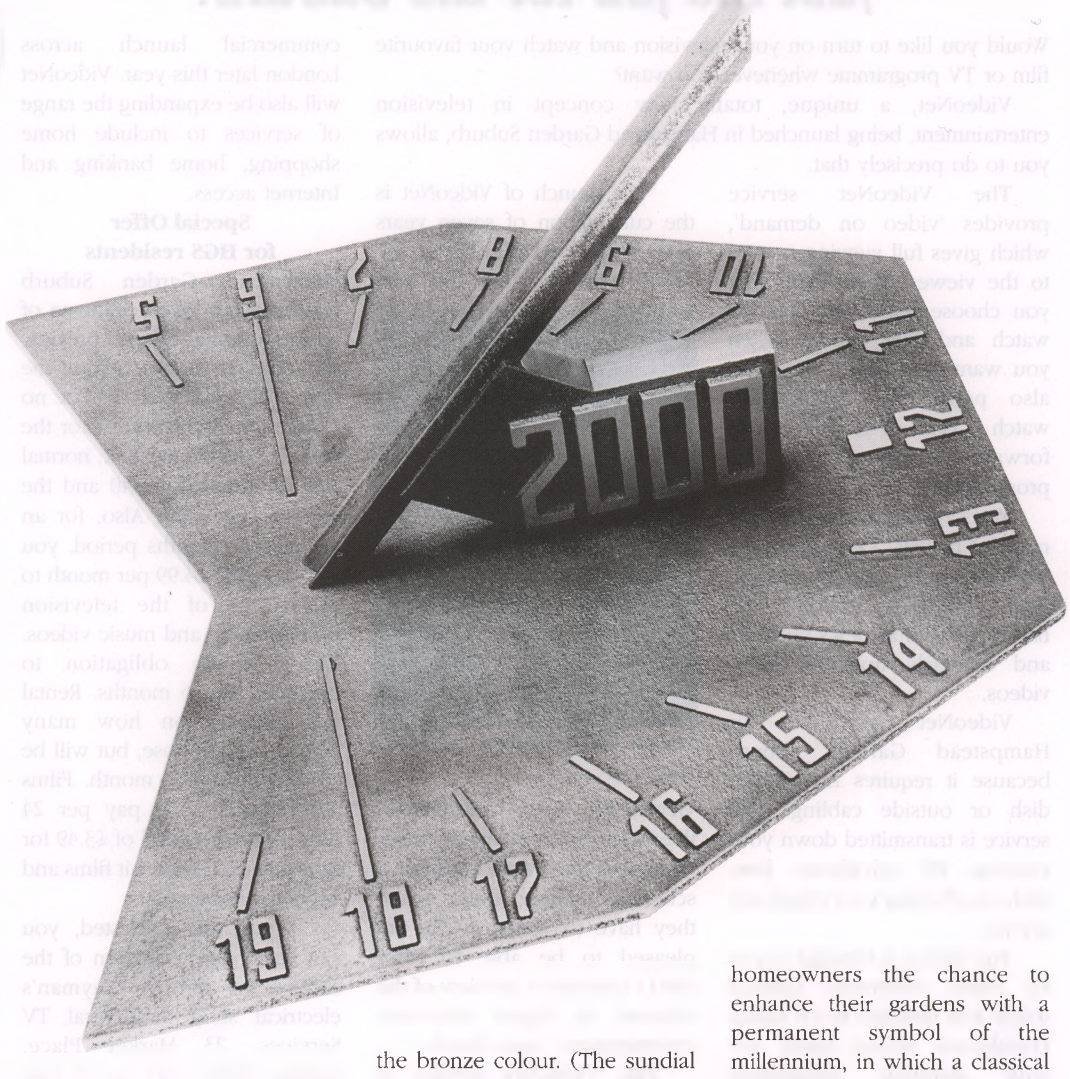
The architect, Ivor Hall, a Suburb resident since 1960, has designed a sundial for the millennium.

A sundial consists of two elements: a flat plate, marked with the hours: and a sloping flange called a gnomon - nothing to do with garden gnomes. Hall's ingenious idea was to have the date 2000 cast on the gnomon which casts the shadow.

There is a beautiful simplicity to the idea - and a nice irony too; for, as the world moves on at breakneck speed Hall has gone back to basics and designed a time-marker with classical antecedents, one which will forever be free of technical faults. It will make a fine garden ornament - a keynote centrepiece and conversation piece amid flowerbeds or a well-mown lawn.

Hall admits that before he had his idea he knew next to nothing about sundial design. He put in months of preliminary research and design development, with Frank W Cousins's book *Sundials* (1969) as his bible.

By graphical construction, computer generated drawings were prepared, using the latitude at Greenwich Observatory (51 28' 38.2" rounded up to 51 30') for the angle of the gnomon. He set out, with some accuracy, hour lines which reduce between 06.00 to 12.00 and increase from 12.00 to 18.00. Because the plate is cast, accuracy of the dial cannot be absolutely assured; but it will indicate the time to a reasonable standard - you will know how long to stay in your hammock and when it is teatime. 12 noon on all horizontal sundials must face True North: at 12 noon the shadow of the sun is over the 12 marker.



Hall's millennium sundial has a seven-sided dial plate - the effect of the attractive faceting is rather like spread birds' wings. The cross-section of the gnomon echoes the base 'footprint' and its support carries, on both sides, the numerals 2000. The numerals and hour lines are, unusually, raised above the surface of the plate and make their own shadow. The sundial, cast in bronze, is finally burnished by hand and finished with natural wax polish to retain the bronze colour. (The sundial can also be ordered in natural bronze, unwaxed, to allow it to weather naturally.) The dial plate covers an area of about 30cms square and sits comfortably on a round platform of 43cms or a square one of 40cms.

Ivor Hall has received serious interest from the Millennium Committee of Luton to cast a larger version with a 1.5m square footprint; other authorities are also considering this expanded version. But Hall's main object in designing the sundial is to give homeowners the chance to enhance their gardens with a permanent symbol of the millennium, in which a classical convention is rethought with modernist flair. He has registered his design with the Patent Office (Registration number 2078644).

The dial is available from the Garden Suburb Gallery in Hampstead Way or from Sundial 2000 Limited at £195 including postage, packing and VAT. A reconstituted stone base is at present being developed, at an expected ex works cost of £150 plus delivery, from Sundial 2000 Limited.

BEVIS HILLIER

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 advantage 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. The surface will weather slightly and have an open texture. This helps the brickwork to 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 is an impartial adviser.

The Government's housing improvement schemes include include repointing as one of the items which qualify for grants, but these 'improvements' also include 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 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 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 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, weather-tightness 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.

Popular misconceptions

- The purpose of mortar is to hold bricks together. **Wrong:** its purpose is to keep 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 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 weather-tight wall. **Wrong:** the most sound 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 the water will penetrate where there is a crack or imperfection, and every building has them 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.