

Letters to the editor

In defence of Henrietta Barnett status quo

8 Cornwood Close
N2 0HP

Sir
I read with considerable annoyance the letter from Loren Loeb, concerning Henrietta Barnett School. Far from convincing me that the school's status would be beneficially changed by becoming comprehensive, the arguments expounded in Ms Loeb's letter have confirmed my opinion that HB would be far better off left alone to do what it does best: educating girls.

It is most regrettable that one of the main points raised was that Dame Henrietta Barnett's intention was to create the Hampstead Garden Suburb as a "garden suburb for the working classes", and therefore all that this would imply for a school bearing her name. I fear that Ms Loeb has been living in a time warp! The HGS is one of the most expensive areas in the whole of Great Britain in which to live. If only girls from the immediate catchment area of the school were to attend, they would almost inevitably be from families far wealthier than Dame Henrietta's "working classes". Hardly "egalitarian", is it?

The whole ethos of Henrietta Barnett School is to educate those girls able to reach the exacting standards required by the entrance examination. The school does not care about wealth, background, creed, colour or religion: its only criterion is academic achievement. Ranting on about feeder-schools and the rejection of "local girls" smacks somewhat of sour grapes. Ms Loeb also complains that private tuition puts unnecessary

pressure on the girls who are educated at state schools (as opposed to those educated in private junior schools). At the risk of stating the obvious, all examinations cause pressure.

Before I am accused of writing the above because I wish to protect the status of a school attended by my daughter, I should point out that I have two daughters - and my elder daughter failed to obtain a place at the school. My reaction at the time was of disappointment, but acceptance of the fact and the hope that the younger one would gain a place.

In amongst a whole host of specious arguments, on absolute gem stood out like a beacon, demanding to be shot down in flames! The comment was made that "if Henrietta Barnett were attended by those girls living closest to the school", traffic congestion would be alleviated. Well, perhaps it would, perhaps it wouldn't - the argument is irrelevant. If Ms Loeb concentrated a little less on the traffic problems in her environmental area, and a great deal more on the education of children, perhaps her arguments would carry more weight. We are discussing education, not traffic jams!

If Henrietta Barnett School were to become comprehensive, it would not become co-educational - it is not big enough. Equally, there is no room for expansion within its existing site, and there is little likelihood that it would be relocated. Therefore, it would remain a single-sex girls' school, with an academic population of about 650. However, without an entrance examination requirement, its already over-subscribed condition would be exacerbated - in simple

terms, its catchment area would contract to encompass little more than the Hampstead Garden Suburb and parts of Golders Green and Finchley. Instead of accepting girls from a cross-section of society whose common denominator is a high academic standard, the school's intake would be almost exclusively from families wealthy enough to live in these expensive areas. Inevitably, academic standards would fall.

In all of the discussions and arguments I have heard on this subject, one thing has become abundantly clear. The very people who complain about Henrietta Barnett's entrance examination standards are those who have most to benefit from a relaxation of these standards - regrettably, there is nothing altruistic about their opinions. There are complaints aplenty about falling educational standards, yet the "something-for-nothing" attitudes proliferate. HB's high academic standards have been achieved by a combination of committed teaching and intelligent pupils; please do not allow political expediency to destroy an institution whose achievements were recently rewarded by the Evening Standard Award for Academic Excellence...

...how ironic that the presenter of this award was our present Minister for education - a politician whose political party has deliberately made it possible to obliterate grammar schools like HBS, and whose own party leader (and our PM) sends his own children to 'selective' schools!

Yours
Jeffrey Black

Thoughtless parkers

I live near to the footpath leading to Little Wood. Cars are frequently parked across the entrance to the Wood making access difficult for wheelchairs or baby prams or push chairs. Some time ago the Council wrote to residents nearby asking them to keep this access clear but bad habits have once more developed.

I have written to the Council and they have promised that their parking attendants will watch out for vehicles parked obstructively and, if necessary, issue appropriate warning notices.

Yours
V J Timberlake

Addison Way and Falloden Way

37 Hogarth Hill
NW11 6AY

Sir
I read Terry Rand's recent article about the Falloden Way / A1000 controversy with interest. Also with some exasperation. The trunking of the Falloden Way has been a fait accompli for some decades now, and there is no way that the Department of Transport and Environment would ever reinstate the A1000 as an alternative to the A1. (In fact, even if Falloden Way were de-trunked and put under local control, the problem would be largely the same - traffic would still prefer to use this route (however controlled) to the A1000.)

The problem is the impact which Falloden Way has on the Suburb. Addison Way has become little more than a slip road for the A1 / Finchley Road junction, with all the noise, dirt and general degradation that goes with it. It has also become extremely dangerous as impatient motorists 'rat-run' from one end to the other as fast as they can.

Sadly the deterioration of Addison Way does not seem to bother the Suburb authorities to any great extent - which sits strangely with the emphasis which the Suburb is supposed to give to ensuring the

integrity and proper maintenance of its border areas.

This is a great pity, as it would be so easy to prevent access to Addison Way at the Falloden Way / Addison Way junction. In fact, my understanding is that neither the local authority nor the DTE have any objection to doing this. Rather, it has been the concern of some residents not to do anything that might be seen as enthroning the trunk road status of Falloden Way and cutting North South communication at this point that has stood in the way of action.

This position is hopeless of course. The status of Falloden Way is not going to be changed. Instead, attention should be given to arranging the junction so that it allows only north/south movements between the two halves of the suburb. (Suitable arrangements can also be made for local access to and from Falloden Way.)

This would not only achieve the aim of ensuring greater (and safer) contact between the two sides of the Suburb but would relieve Addison Way of its through traffic burden. Or being only Addison Way, does anybody care?

Yours
John Ditchfield

Prize and a new novel for Suburb author

The first award of the new Peter Surava Prize (of £12,000) for services to freedom of expression was handed earlier this year to Moris Farhi of North Square, who chairs the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN. Over the years, he and his colleagues have helped secure the release of scores of authors, editors or journalists imprisoned by oppressive regimes solely because of their dissident views - such as Iranian editor Faraj Sarkoohi who faced a death sentence, and a number in Turkey and Nigeria. PEN, the international organisation for writers, campaigns for prisoners of every political or religious hue, and much of Moris's time is given to this cause.

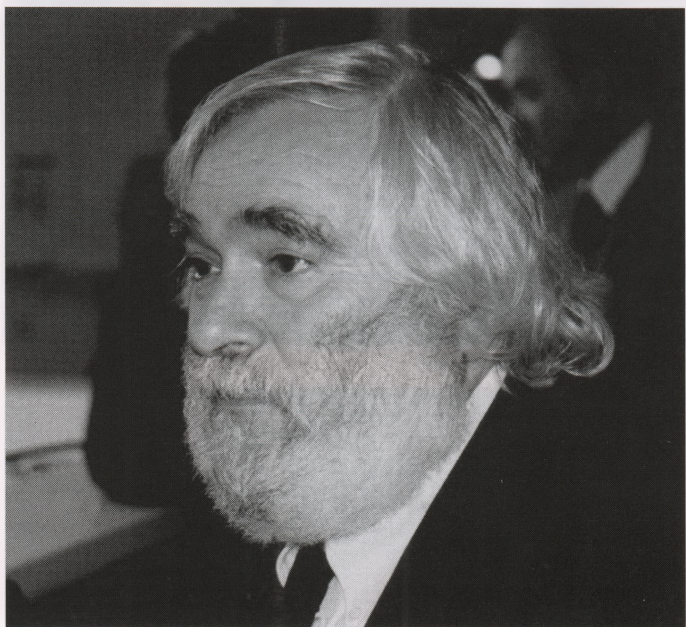
This is one reason why his latest novel, 'Children of the Rainbow' (Saqi Books £15.99), took ten years to write - that and the immense amount of research which has given the narrative such authenticity. His theme is the persecution of the Gypsies who were as much victims of the holocaust as were the Jews.

Moris, son of a Sephardic Jewish family which - on the Greek side - had itself been almost annihilated in the holocaust, grew up in Turkey in a poor district of Ankara where, as a boy, he often played with nearby Gypsy children (but was never allowed to bring them home). When the family moved to Istanbul he studied at the American College there (and was active in amateur dramatics). His father, a furniture retailer, then sent him to Bradford to learn textile technology, but after a short spell scouring sheepskins he had had enough and ran off

to London, helped by a friend who secured him an audition at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art which started his career as an actor. But in those days (the 1950's) any trace of an accent was considered an impediment, and so he turned with more success to script-writing for such TV series as 'The Onedin Line', 'The Saint' and 'Menace'. His first novel was written in 1972 (a thriller) followed by others of which 'Children of the Rainbow' is the latest. He came to Hampstead Garden Suburb in 1975, first to

their forced labour on farms and the electro-convulsive therapy to which runaways were subjected, for example.

The persecution of Gypsies continues in East Europe today. In Romania, they are openly referred to as sub-human, and there has been forced sterilisation in Czechoslovakia. Tito once promised them a homeland comparable to Israel, but nothing came of it (the Gypsies' actual place of origin was India). To write his book, Moris Farhi had to travel widely, and, above all,



Heathgate and then to North Square, with his wife Nina who is a leading analytical psychotherapist. Now he is working on a book of stories from the Turkey of the 1950's when a multicultural society flourished.

'Children of the Rainbow' is the story of a Gypsy child saved from Auschwitz and ultimately adopted in Switzerland. He becomes a successful professional man until he discovers his origins and his Gypsy destiny. Much of the background to the book is historically authentic - the abduction of Gypsy children,

secure the confidence of Gypsies naturally mistrustful of all outsiders. He ultimately became a close friend (in fact, blood-brother) of the first president of the World Romany Union and of other Gypsy leaders.

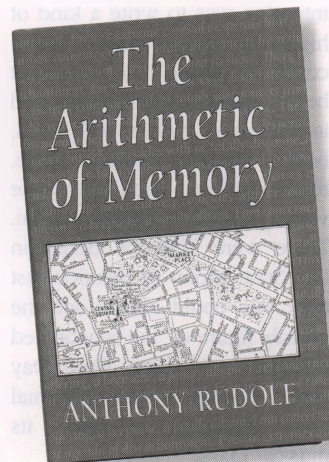
The book is doubly remarkable for its imaginative treatment of a neglected subject and for having been written by a Jew who is only too familiar with the holocaust from a very different perspective.

ELIZABETH GUNDREY

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'The Arithmetic of Memory' by Anthony Rudolf

The Arithmetic of Memory is a subtly composed and highly original autobiographical study of memory. This story of a Jewish boy's childhood and adolescence in Hampstead Garden Suburb, told thirty five years on, maps the author's kingdom. But he is as interested in the process of memory as in the memories themselves and has built into the structure of the text his misgivings and doubts concerning the very project of autobiography. The memories (from the earliest in 1946 to the latest in 1961) are tracked as objectively as possible and then subjected to hindsight and reflection. The Arithmetic of Memory is playfully written and often poignantly funny.



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