

Opening of the Big Wood Memorial Gate



Consam member Denis Ross and Micky Watkins, in the background Helen Spring, Mel Lloyd and Cllr Jasmin Nagbar.



Sally Lewis with her son and granddaughter Simon and Olivia, Andrew and Sally Botteril.

Despite a very gloomy weather forecast for the 28 April 2001 by midday a large throng had gathered for the occasion at the Temple Fortune Hill entrance. Leonie Stephen, the Chairman of the Residents' Association Trees and Open Spaces Committee, welcomed everyone and invited the Revd Tony Spring, Minister of the Free Church, to talk about those who were to be remembered at the gate. He said that gates were significant places in any human community. It was at the gates of a town in ancient Israel that justice was dispensed, arguments were arbitrated, law defined and praise and celebration began. So it was

very fitting, only 12 days before the 60th anniversary of the ending of the London Blitz, to come to this spot where the gate had been restored as a memorial, and for the community to remember the 30 civilians living on the Suburb whose lives were lost during the Second World War. Most of these had lived in the blitz itself, when the enemy sought unsuccessfully, by nightly indiscriminate bombing of the civilian population, to create fear and panic and to weaken resolve.

We could see in the siting of this gate and the timing of this event a number of coinciding intersections. Henrietta Barnett, whose inspiration resulted in

buying parcels of land to give rise to the Suburb and this community, was born just 150 years ago this week. It was clear in some people's memory, notably Alan Lawson and Ethel Whitehead, who were both present, that a gate was set up here before the First World War. Since little happened on the Suburb in those days without Mrs Barnett's approval, we can presume that she agreed. This was the key entrance to the wood, the highest point of entry, and the gate had stood open for 364 days a year.

Then there were historical intersections of significance about this spot. The origin of the wood

itself is believed to be of ancient woodland. Its edge at this point marked the western boundary of a large estate owned since the eighth Century by the incumbent Bishop of London. In time it became the march of the manors of Hendon and Finchley, and more recently the boroughs of the same names until they came together as the London Borough of Barnet in 1965.

Turning attention to those civilians resident in the Suburb who died as a result of enemy action, the first were Werner and Gertrude Knorr and their son Harold (2). They were German Jews who has escaped persecution and settled on the Suburb. Sadly they lost their lives in Gurney Drive on 19 September 1940.

The most devastating attack of all occurred six days later when two landmines fell on the Suburb. One destroyed much of Coleridge Walk and 13 people died. The second fell on Willifield Green. While there was much structural damage around the green and the Club House and many houses were pulled down, there were fortunately no deaths, only injuries. Those who died in and around Coleridge Walk were Percy and Alice Crow and their daughter Rita (1), Charlotte Hughes, Edward Smith and the Emmoney family, all from Coleridge Walk, John Locker from Wordsworth Walk and Jessie Viney from Addison Way. Every death was a tragedy of the arbitrariness and brutality of war, but particularly in the case of the Emmoney family, Arthur and Lilian, and their four daughters, Margaret, Janet, Ann and Sally. Lilian and the girls had been evacuated to Devon, while Arthur remained in London. In September he wrote to his wife that he had finished erecting and burying an Anderson air-raid shelter in the back garden. Lily and her daughters returned home to Coleridge Walk shortly before the landmine fell and sadly the whole family perished. Tony Spring said how pleased he was that we had been joined at the gate by three members of Lily's family, Steven Joyce, Lily's great nephew, and his uncle and aunt, Richard and Margaret Joyce.

The next fatalities occurred on 1 October when a bomb fell on Brookland Rise, killing William and Rose Hunter, their son Harry and his wife Gladys and their son Douglas (12). William was a director of Coparts, a precursor landlord of the Suburb Trust, and in his spare time was the first accompanist of the Free Church Choir. He and his wife had moved in with their son's family only five days earlier because of damage to their house. Six weeks later another landmine killed two residents in Ossulton Way, William Albert and Desiree Williams. In June 1944 a flying bomb landed in Widecombe Way killing May Brown, Walter and Alison Hawkins and their daughter Celia (16).

The Memorial Gate also commemorated three Suburb civilians who lost their lives at sea, Robert Lockie, Michael Rennie, the son of the Vicar of St Jude-on-the-Hill, who was taking children to safety in Canada, and Sir John Abraham.

Although 14 of these 30 names are remembered on the War Memorial in the Free Church, it is most fitting that the complete list in a Memorial Book will be kept in the Suburb Archive. Tony Spring concluded by saying how indebted we all were to Michael Holton for his persistent and perceptive research which had ensured that these facts were remembered and the memories treasured. We should also be aware that we could never achieve a total record of the pain and suffering, the anguish, and the sense of loss and futility that war caused.

The Revd Alan Walker, Vicar of St Jude's, before dedicating the gate, said that as we remembered those civilians who had lost their lives during the war we gave thanks for all those who had lived and died in the service of others, and we remembered all those who continued to suffer as a result of inhumanity, and all those in need.

We also prayed for the peace of the world; for statesmen and rulers, that they may have wisdom to know and courage to do what is right; for all who work to improve international relationships, that they may find the true way to reconcile people of different race, colour and creed; and for men and women the world over, that they may have justice and freedom, and live in security and peace.

And as we asked for God's blessing on our Memorial Gate

we pledged ourselves anew to God's service, and to service of our fellow men and women; that we may help, encourage and comfort others; and support those working for the relief of the needy and for the peace and welfare of the nations.

"Open to us the gates of righteousness, and we will go into them and praise the Lord".

Finally, having been invited to open the Memorial Gate (now suitably decked out) the Mayor of Barnet, Gill Sergeant, performed the last act of her year in office. As a Suburb resident she was glad to participate in such an important occasion in the Suburb's history, and praised the community for their thoughtfulness in filling a gap in the official recollection of the last war. The role of civilians in war had largely gone unnoticed until recently.

Altogether it had been a moving experience, for which even the bad weather which had been forecast had held off.

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The plant sale in aid of the North London Hospice is becoming a must on the Suburb's social calendar. Held in Chris and Lorna Page's spectacular corner garden it turns into more of a garden party than a plant sale. Nevertheless it raises lots of money for the Hospice too.



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