

# The Garden Suburb Theatre

The Garden Suburb Theatre ended the year 2001 with 'Bedroom Farce' at the Institute Theatre and with a double bill of Coward and Bennett at 'The Gatehouse' in Highgate. For the first the stage was too small and, for the second, too long.

Alan Ayckbourn's 'Bedroom Farce' needs a set containing three separate bedrooms with enough space for the actors to move about and, in the case of one pair, to indulge in some do-it-yourself joinery.

In spite of the best efforts of the director, John Woolf, and the designer, David Lane, the cramped space worked against the humour. The play concerns three couples and two rogue characters. The elderly couple, for whom bed is a place for food, had the most space and had room to expand their roles. Sarah Falk and Roger Rose took the opportunity and got a lot of fun out of the nocturnal eating interrupted by the emotional Susannah, played with manic desperation by Ashley Collins. Nick and Jan's lack of space did not matter so much as Nick spends most of his time in bed with a bad back. But here too, there was not enough room to make the arrival of the awful Trevor really telling. Anthony Abreu and Susan Quine did what they could.

Most disadvantaged were Johnny MacPherson and Liz Travis as Malcolm and Kate, since there was no room to make his antics with the self-assembly furniture really funny or the fate of Kate, hidden under a mountain of coats, farcical.

The awful Trevor, who burst in on them as well, was very well portrayed by Eugene Smith, a telling study of male insensitivity.

When, later in December, I saw the double bill at 'The Gatehouse' I could not help wondering if Ayckbourn's play would not have fared better there.

'The Gatehouse' in Highgate is not an ideal venue either. It is long and thin with the audience at each end quite a way from the action and with a sideways view. Also being so near to the audience requires a difference style of acting.

It has to be true, you cannot get away with the tricks you could use on a raised stage.

On these terms Noel Coward's 'Still Life' defeated these actors. Ashley Collins, who was so good in Ayckbourn, seemed petrified by the audience and never raised her eyes. Her Laura never looked as though she was going through a painful love affair. Andrew Graze, as Alec, at least appeared ardent and concerned. The rest of the cast looked as if they

were playing charades, with silly walks and funny voices. The exception was Val Gregory as Dolly. Her portrayal of this insensitive woman was believable, she was a person we could all recognise and shudder at. The evening ended with Alan Bennett's 'A Chip In The Sugar'. Richard Kinder's portrayal of Graham was excellent. Graham's distress and jealousy of the interloper between himself and his mother was

revealed in his eyes and gestures. A very true study, funny and moving. Mandy Ribekow Evans, again directing, got quite a lot of movement into the monologue and successfully moved Kinder about in this difficult space. I did wonder, however, what impact this made with the audience seated so far away at each end. A brave venture all in all, from which many lessons can be learned.

LEONIE STEPHEN

## The Free Church organ

The organ in the Free Church was built in 1912 by Norman and Beard. The quality of construction is first class and, as those who have heard it can testify, it makes a majestic sound.

The organ has served the Church well for 90 years, with very little maintenance, and is now due for overhaul. This will begin in September and take about four months to complete. The work is being carried out by Nicholson, a firm based in Worcester, which has recently carried out work on the organs in Portsmouth Cathedral, Christchurch Priory, Gloucester Cathedral and Southwell Minster as well as many smaller churches.

Norman and Beard were at the forefront of pneumatic action design and their techniques were later adopted by many other famous organ builders. But, although it has a dominant position in the Church, the organ has a very cramped layout. We have Sir Edwin

Lutyens to thank for that! Thus, major dismantling is necessary if anything goes wrong with the pneumatics. So we are taking the opportunity to partially convert the action to electro-pneumatic. This will leave the actual playing action at the pipes as it is at present. The present visual aspect of the organ will be unaffected.

The total cost will be of the order of £100,000. We have already started to raise funds with the well-supported Carol concert and a legacy of some £10,000 from a former organist. We will be organising various activities throughout the year and hope that they will be widely supported.

The organ at the Free Church is a wonderful asset for everyone to enjoy. We are confident that, after the refurbishment, it will give good service for many generations to come. It is a worthy cause for your generous support.

JOHN BRYCE

## News from Fellowship

As always at Christmas, bowls of hyacinths were delivered to the elderly and housebound on the Suburb. This year the exercise was organised with military precision by Christine Rafferty (who has taken over from Iris Elkington).

By the time you read this our New Year parties - always a

highlight of the year - will have come and gone.

None of this would be possible were it not for the monies subscribed annually by Suburb residents. Fellowship is very grateful to all those who contribute.

EILEEN WHELAN

## Head of Police provides the answers

Chief Superintendent Sue Akers, Commander of Barnet's police, heads a meeting arranged by HGS Neighbourhood Watch at Norrice Lea Synagogue on Thursday, 21 February 2002.

The meeting, open to all residents of the HGS, starts at 8pm with the spotlight on Barnet's Policing Plan for 2002, the Community Safety Strategy and Partnership between the Borough and the Police, an overview of crime in the Borough, Police initiative and policing style, and reactions to proposals being made by the Home Secretary for the shape of future policing.

Joining Chief Superintendent Sue Akers are DCI Geoff Irving who is responsible for 'crime and disorder reduction', Inspector Jenny

Hounsell who recently took over Golders Green Police Station and our Beat officer PC Jeff Williams.

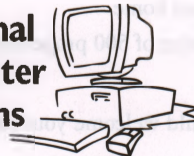
The meeting provides a rare opportunity for people to get their questions answered by the top people. It will also give you the chance of meeting members of your neighbourhood watch steering committee, your coordinators and street wardens.

If you have a question, this is your chance to get it answered.

So make a date: 8pm at the Norrice Lea Synagogue on 21 February 2002.

KAYE WATSON

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(Above) Violet Luckbam with the new sundial, a memorial to her husband Cyril, the original of which was stolen last year. The new one, paid for by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust and neighbours, is "firmly anchored" says Violet.

(Below) Rev Ralph Baldry led the dedication of the sundial and a party of friends, relatives and neighbours enjoyed the sunshine in the peace of Lucas Square.



## Have you any Proms photographs?

The Proms at St Jude's is 10 years old this year and the organisers are looking for photos of any of the previous ones to mount an

exhibition. If you are happy to lend any which you think may be suitable please send them to Susie Gregson 3 Wild Hatch NW11.



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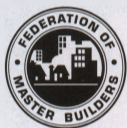
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