

2001: An eventful year

Some Reflections from the Chairman of the Events Committee

As we stood on peaceful Central Square watching the fireworks on New Year's Eve 2001, nobody could have anticipated the horrors of 11 September and all their consequences. At the time, relatively anodyne speculations about the General Election were making the headlines; as soon as the foot-and-mouth dilemma allowed the Prime Minister to make a decision on when to go to the country, we witnessed a period of intense political activity. Reflecting the interest in current affairs, the Events Committee became involved with two events that took place in April. We had anticipated that an early General Election would follow, but the devastating foot-and-mouth disease postponed the date chosen for polling day. However, when the invited representatives of the four main parties came to articulate their policies at a Political Forum in the Free Church Hall, they were undaunted by the delay. Miranda Dunn, the Green candidate, Councillor John Marshall, for the Conservatives, Sarah Teather, for the Liberal Democrats and Dr Rudi Vis, the Labour candidate, entered the debate in good humour; they presented their party manifestos and responded to a wide variety of written topical questions from the audience. Richard Wakefield was the amiable chairman.

One of the biggest local events of the year was the BBC *Any Questions?* team's visit to the Suburb, with Jonathan Dimbleby in the chair. The weekly Friday evening programme has long been a national listening pastime and the April 20th live transmission from the Free Church was undoubtedly an important landmark in the history of Suburb events. A packed audience was present to welcome the panellists – Susan Kramer, Rhodri Morgan, Arthur Scargill and Tim Yeo; all of them showed their expertise in presenting their views on a range of topics, which included race relations, teachers' salaries, animal culling compensation and 'having a go' in self-defence. The BBC had previously sent us a letter, detailing their requirements for setting up, seating, ticket and stewarding arrangements.

Ablly supported by a large number of loyal and committed RA volunteers, this committee did their best to ensure that everything went ahead without a hitch.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of Dame Henrietta Barnett's birth, the Committee helped Chris Kellerman with the preliminaries for a Charity Walk from St Jude's to Toynbee Hall on Saturday 5 May. In fact, the correct birth date was 4 May, but Chris felt that more people would participate if the walk took place at the weekend. In the event, 18 stalwarts presented themselves in St Jude's car park, ready to trek the 9½ miles to Whitechapel. The idea originated with a suggestion from Chris Kellerman, who considered it an excellent way of raising funds for Toynbee Hall. He took them on a fascinating tour along London's green and open

spaces, canal towpaths, City streets and even a visit to the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Tea awaited the intrepid band of men and women, who took a mere 3½ hours to reach their destination. Congratulations to them for their stamina – and success in raising £500 for the charity.

On 17 May in the Free Church Hall, Michael Rowley gave a most illuminating talk about the architecture of the Suburb, entitled "Lessons from a Dream". An original feature of the lecture was the use he made of two projectors to show a simultaneous series of slides. He explained how street planning leads the eye towards focal points; the juxtaposition of symmetry and asymmetry in the houses, designed to add interest and meaning to the domestic scenery; the clever ways of relating the entire conception of suburban dwellings to the roads and pathways, woodlands, heath lands, squares and twittens. The speaker illustrated this memorable and much-appreciated talk with a galaxy of superb coloured slides.

A splendid Tea Party for New Suburb Residents took place at the Free Church Hall on Sunday 8 July. We sent out 300 invitations to 150 new residents and to the valiant Membership Committee contingent responsible for delivering reminders and collecting RA subscriptions. Thirty new residents had accepted the invitation. Dark grey skies threatened to drench the proceedings, but it remained dry and everyone enjoyed a fine afternoon in the garden. We are grateful to the Family Holiday Association for providing teas, with a wonderful selection of savoury bridge rolls and homemade cakes. The lively gathering included a large proportion of RA Council members, who were on hand to act as hosts. In the event, we were disappointed that only three new resident families attended. Perhaps the Wimbledon finals kept them away, or it may have been the lack of sunshine. There were two local conflicting events: an HGS Theatre party in Little Wood and a school fête. Council may not consider it worthwhile holding this event every year; they may recommend an alternative evening timing or to aim for a date in September, when new residents are more likely to focus on NW11 rather than SW19.

Sheila Seepersaud-Jones gave the second talk of the season in Fellowship House on 12 July. A talented artist in ceramics, she has lived on the Suburb for many years; on more than one occasion, the Gallery has been proud to exhibit her beautifully crafted and hand-painted pieces. Sheila brought along several examples of her jugs, bowls and sculpted works and set them up in the lobby. She illustrated her talk with vivid coloured slides of her work and of Guyana, where she was born: giving a fascinating account of the extent of Caribbean influences on her sculptures. One of many remarkable aspects of Sheila's life is the fact that she plays a

distinguished and active part in the nursing profession. The small audience, who attended this spell-binding and inspirational talk, had the privilege of experiencing a real gem.

Open House on Sunday 23 September was a great success: the attendance at both churches was the highest ever. The guided walks, led by Stephen Brookhouse, Chris Kellerman and Michael Rowley, were well supported, even in the rain! Especial thanks go to Ruth Smith for her careful organisation.

A fine show of Fireworks on Central Square heralded the New Year 2002. A large crowd had gathered in St Jude's Church beforehand for refreshments, kindly provided by the HGS Trust and the Horticultural Society. We congratulate Alan Brudney, David St George and their team for presenting an exciting and colourful display. The Events Committee appreciates the support from a large contingent of volunteers, who acted as stewards and helped with the catering. There have since been several requests that this event should take place every New Year's Eve on a regular basis.

The Suburb now boasts several attractive new notice boards, made by David Lewis of Northway. They afforded extra publicity for the New Year's Fireworks and undoubtedly added to the large crowds who attended this event.

This committee has resumed its responsibility for compiling the copy for *What's On*. In the interim, Elizabeth Cockburn and more recently Richard Wakefield, had ensured that publication's continuity: we offer them our sincere appreciation. Our special thanks also go to Carol Kemp for mailing Event forms to the 50-odd organisations for each edition and to Camilla Raab for her invaluable and perceptive proof-reading.

The objectives of the Events Committee are threefold:

- Organising social, cultural and other events for residents of all ages;
- Running events that other Standing Committees request;
- Helping with events, compatible with the aims of the RA, which other organisations may promote.

As an example of the latter, the Committee has helped at several events to collect funds for the Dame Henrietta Barnett Fund.

In order to identify the relative popularity of events, Committee Member Deborah Warland prepared a survey for publication in the autumn and winter issues of *Suburb News*. All residents returning the questionnaire are candidates in a prize-winning draw; the Residents Association has offered the winning entrant a dinner for two at the Capriccio. Members of this Committee look forward to studying the replies and suggestions; they anticipate that the results of the survey will place them in a stronger position to reflect local demand for a programme of choice events.

DAVID LITTAUR

A Suburb gardener's winter

Gazing out at my garden during December and January I realised I had been very busy giving advice but had forgotten to take it. As a result of some very heavy but spectacular frosts the contents of a few containers were looking decidedly sad. You remember the containers I told you to protect or move to a more sheltered place? Well I didn't and a couple of poor old agapanthus now resemble very floppy green pasta. I hope they will survive. I did remember to put chicken wire on the pots containing bulbs just to irritate the squirrels.

I am still going on about perfumed shrubs and my *Daphne Bholva* has finally flowered. I bought it a few years ago at a flower show in Victoria and was assured it is the 'bees knees' of the *Daphnes* and it is; pink clusters of flowers and a perfume to die for.

On reflection it was a good year in my garden with the exception of the tragic deaths of my *ceonothus*, *laburnum* and *wisteria*, which I mentioned in my last saga. I have replaced the *laburnum*, which was a bog standard variety, with *laburnum Wateri 'Vossii'* which is characterised by extremely long racemes. Perhaps more difficult to replace was the *ceonothus* which was a focal point at the centre of my estate. After much thought, consideration and Stephen's advice, I have plumped for a *Cornus Kousa*, a greatly overlooked small tree for town gardens. Delicate cream flowers in June followed in autumn by the most unusual strawberry-like fruits. My poor *wisteria* is still dead at the front of the house and I suppose I am hoping for a miracle in spring but I am not holding my breath.

My hot border still hasn't quite the look I want so a few adjustments are necessary. I am trying to get a sort of Piet Oudolf look about it. Have any of you seen articles about this man? If you have *Gardeners World* July 2001 I think you will see what I really want. Great swathes of grasses with drifts of perennials and the shades and colours just blend into each other. Of course mine will have to be on a much smaller scale but I am going to give it a go. He has created two large borders at Wisley but they really need another year to come into their own.

February is a good time for a bit of winter pruning and I know I have said it before but it is far easier to do when there aren't any leaves. I also prune *clematis* now, particularly if that's what the label tells me to do. Those of you who worry about *clematis* might be interested in a talk organised by the Horticultural Society. Marcel Floyd, a *clematis* specialist, will be talking and showing slides on the growing and pruning of these wonderful plants and he will also have plants for us buy. This will be on 26 March at 7.30 pm at Fellowship House, so do try and come. I think we all get a bit nervous about this plant but I am sure Mr Floyd will reassure us all.

I always read in magazines the jobs to do each month and try to pass on the most important tips to you. There is one that never ceases to amaze me and that is to wash and scrub all your old flowerpots. Do people really do this or can they just be crammed into the dishwasher!



As it is the Queen's Golden Jubilee this year, I am sure you have all been giving this a great deal of thought (hah!) and are planning your borders, beds and containers with plants of yellow and golden hues. I have ordered a range of lilies (I just love lily beetle) in these colours and this is only the beginning. We can have *tagetes*, yellow summer bedding *dahlias* and *calendula officinalis* 'Indian Prince'. The choice is endless. Sunflowers in many shades of yellow. Keep a look out for *Velvet Queen*, *Moonwalker* or a copper coloured

Prado Red. There are plenty of annuals to grow from seed; *cosmos sulphureus*, *nasturtiums* and *poppies*. I think we should stick to annuals as we don't want all these dreadful colours next year do we? It would be like Bournemouth in the 70's.

March and April are quite busy months, roses to prune, perennials to divide if required, the scattering of a general fertiliser, more mulching, a leg was and just generally getting stuck in!

Good gardening.

DIANE BERGER

BROWNHILL MORRIS & WEST
(INSURANCE SERVICES) LTD

*"For a man's house
is his castle"*

Edward Coke - 1628

Whether your home is a castle or perhaps something a little less salubrious, our expertise enables us to negotiate the most appropriate cover at the best possible terms, to protect your most valuable assets.

Brownhill, Morris & West have in depth knowledge for all aspects of property insurance, castle or manor, mews or maisonette, as well as specialist schemes for the High Net Worth client and Neighbourhood Watcher.

- ❖ High Net Worth
- ❖ Art & Antiques
- ❖ Let Properties
- ❖ Second Homes
- ❖ Flats
- ❖ Neighbourhood Watch
- ❖ Digital Photo-imaging

020 8658 4334

16 Bromley Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 5JE

Fax 020 8650 5065

E-mail: info@brownhills.net