

The Suburb Centenary Flowerbed



On Wednesday morning, 2 May, a lone gardener trudged across Willifield Green to put the final touches to a project that had taken a year of careful planning and dedicated hard work by members of the HGS Horticultural Society: the making of a commemorative raised flowerbed, celebrating 100 years of Suburb life.

The story began in spring 2006 when the idea for the flowerbed first saw the light. Stephen Crisp, currently gardener to the US Ambassador at his London residence and a long-time friend to the Society, was asked to draw up a design based on the RA's Centenary Logo translated into a jigsaw of hundreds of tiny plants. The RA

and the Trust gave their blessing to the erection of a temporary structure on Willifield Green and Barnet confirmed that planning permission would not be needed as they owned the land! Ward Cllr. Andrew Harper and Sarah Sands, Head of the Garden Suburb Infants School, agreed to back Chairman Marjorie Harris's application for a lottery grant from Awards for All and in October Marjorie plunged into a nightmare of bureaucratic form-filling to convince the powers that be that the flowerbed would improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

She must have done a good job because in January 2007, Awards for All granted £3,000. In

addition, Hort Soc members donated over £500 for upkeep so the project could go ahead.

With the efficiency of a top design guru, Stephen cracked into action. A specialist nursery translated his design into computerised 9 x 12cms modules to spell out HGS Centenary 2007 in red alenantha plants against a light green centre edged with darker green borders. Box hedging provided protection and definition to the display. Plants were ordered and seeds sown.

By April, Josh Berger had built the wooden surround which was then painted in Farrow and Ball's Linden Green. On 24 April it was put on site at the east end of Willifield Green and filled with

25 sacks of best compost. "Stephen made us stamp down every layer," said Diane Berger. "It was very hard work. Passers-by thought we were doing a rain dance!"

On Friday 27 April, the plant modules arrived and were carefully laid out on the grass. After lunch, an army of small gardeners from Year 2 in Garden Suburb Infants School, clutching their diminutive trowels, advanced across the Green. Sarah Sands, their Head Teacher, had enthusiastically supported the project and was delighted to lend vetted staff to supervise the children. In school, they have their own garden and tools and the nine lucky youngsters set to with great determination, planting the plugs and drizzling compost in all the right places. By tea-time, the raised bed was complete and carefully covered with fleece. Hort Soc members planted the box hedge the following day.

On Monday, Finchley Nurseries delivered two enormous half-barrels beautifully planted to match the carpet bedding and stand alongside the raised bed. Early on Wednesday 2 May, Michael Franklin fenced the bed with scarlet ribbons and Hort Soc members and crowds of Suburb residents gathered for the unveiling.

The centenary celebrations began with the presentation of Henrietta Barnett roses to the occupants of the first built cottages at 140-142 Hampstead Way. Then everyone trooped up Asmunds Hill to watch Hort Soc Presidents Jonathan Ross and Jane Goldman cut the ribbon to unveil the Centenary Flowerbed and commemorative plaque. Marjorie Harris thanked everyone for all their hard work and stressed that from the first this had been a community project. Many of the schoolchildren visit their handiwork every day and pick up litter. Sgt. Edmondson and his Community Police team, together with London Community Security Services, will keep an eye on things. Hort Soc members have signed up for regular watering and maintenance duties until the first frosts. Barnet Council have agreed to help with watering if there is a drought and, at the end of the season, they will reinstate the turf on the Green to its original condition.

Hampstead Garden Suburb should be justly proud of this splendid adornment. Let Jane Goldman, the Society President,

have the last word, as reported in the Ham & High: "We are very fortunate to live here. It's a lovely place to bring up children and being part of the Horticultural Society is a proper community thing to do."

If you would like to join in, the next event on the Horticultural Society calendar is the Great Suburb Open Garden Bonanza on Sunday 10 June from 2 - 6 pm when 21 local

gardens will open to the public providing a rare opportunity to see the best Suburb gardens, some familiar and some new, and buy a delicious tea in selected gardens. Maps and tickets (£5 per person; children under 15 free) are available from 4 Asmunds Hill on the day. 50% of the profits will be donated to the North London Hospice. See you there.

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Rain on our parade?

During April this year, we had a drought (two weeks with no rainfall). In fact, we had three weeks and a day with no rainfall. The monthly total of just over a tenth of an inch fell in the last week of the month and early May was not much better. Worse still, from the point of view of a gardener, most of the two inches that fell in March fell in the first week. So we have had 7½ weeks with well under an inch of rain.

However, if one considers the winter rainfall, from November to March, that of 2006-07 was double that of 2005-06, 16½ inches compared with eight inches. So the soil and the aquifers were able to replenish their water levels, trees and shrubs have recovered and the water companies have ended their hosepipe bans.

April's total of just over a tenth of an inch is the third lowest for any month since records began

in North London in 1980. Only September 1985 and August 1995 were drier with exactly one tenth of an inch in each. Periods of seven to eight weeks with well under an inch of rain occurred in summer of 1983, autumn of 1985, spring of 1995 and early spring of 1997. In 2003, there were 6½ weeks with only a quarter of an inch. So we are not in any real trouble yet - provided some rain comes soon!

DIANA IWI

Scarecrow competition

To help celebrate the Suburb centenary in a lighthearted way, the Horticultural Society is running a competition for adults and children to build a life-sized lady scarecrow called 'Henrietta' in celebration of the Dame. The competition is open to anyone of any age, individuals or groups, and all scarecrows will be displayed in the Free Church Hall garden at

the Flower Show on Saturday 16 June and at the Big Birthday Picnic on Central Square the next day. There will be special prizes on the day and there may be a surprise celebrity guest to present them.

So why not get together with family or a group of friends or colleagues, or your class at school, to make sure the Free Church Hall garden and Central Square

are teeming with life-size Dame Henriettas! For details or entry forms contact Yvonne Oliver, Show Secretary, 4 Asmunds Hill, NW11 6ET (020 8455 8741). Entries should be delivered to the Free Church Hall before 2pm on 16 June, but please give Yvonne advance warning, so that she knows how many to expect on the day.