

SUBURB

Proms volunteer

featuring Richard Orme

Richard Orme was born on the Suburb, which has been home to his family for six generations. He is currently a first year student at Durham University reading Geosciences which he describes as ‘in essence traditional Geology with a slightly heavier emphasis on Chemistry’. He rows for his college and enjoys ballroom dancing, as well as being a member of the debating society. He is also involved with the Durham University Christian Union and a local church.

BEHIND THE SCENES

After leaving school Richard, like many young people, had a gap year – he spent a few months working for Sainsbury’s and travelling in the UK – before setting off for The Gambia in West Africa for five months. He says, “As part of a team of eleven, we were spread across four schools, and taught a mixture of English, Sciences, Mathematics and Christian Religious Education to a range of class sizes and age groups. It was great fun and a fantastic opportunity to both learn from and help the community.”

I asked him what aspects of the Suburb impressed him on his return: “I was struck particularly by the ‘greenness’ and freshness of the Suburb. I arrived back from The Gambia late at night. It was wet. In contrast to there, where no rain had fallen during our entire stay and the landscape was dry and parched, the vibrant green of the Suburb’s grass, trees and hedgerows was almost overwhelming. We are so fortunate to live in area with so many accessible open spaces and in an environment where natural beauty can flourish. Another contrast between here and The Gambia is the enormous choice of products one can buy in London and the all-pervading consumerism of our culture.”

“Even now, when I return to the Suburb for vacations, I am filled with a sense of calm. Perhaps this is a consequence of familiarity and memories – such as pond-dipping on the lower ponds of the Heath Extension, playing football or French Cricket with an older brother or sister, making dens with friends, the playground between Oakwood Road and Fallosen Way, allotments, Meadway pre-school in St Jude’s Church Rooms, Free Church Youth Clubs and Bazaars, the Youth Music Centre and Family Association Fêtes on the Square. Happy times!”

Finally, I asked Richard about his involvement with the Proms at St Jude’s: “This is one of the highlights of my year. It really marks the start of the summer, (perhaps because it is associated with the end of the exam period). I think the Proms are wonderful in the way that they bring together a community of different people (faiths, colours, ages and backgrounds) through an accessible festival of music encompassing both the classical and jazz genres, performed to a very high standard. It raises a terrific amount of money for Toynbee Hall\* and the North London Hospice. These organisations are intrinsically linked to the Suburb.

“The Proms give pleasure to all who take part – artistes, organisers and audiences. Aside from being simply fun and worthwhile, it is lovely for me to be able to spend time working alongside friends who I have grown up with, but am

not able to see very much of now. It has been good to gain responsibility and grow in knowledge in a variety of the areas of expertise involved in putting on the Proms – observing from ‘behind the scenes’. It can be exhausting moving a lot of chairs, tables and staging – coupled with consistently late nights – however it is a great privilege to be able to hear the performances and work with such a diverse and dedicated team of volunteers.”

\*For newcomers to the Suburb, Toynbee Hall was founded by Canon Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta in 1884 in memory of Arnold Toynbee (1852-84), a distinguished historian and one of the leaders of the university settlement movement which provided much needed education for the underprivileged in slum districts. Today it continues to give help to many of the needy in the East End of London.

▼ Richard with umbrellas at the ready helping to keep the audience dry at the Proms



SUBURB

Exotica

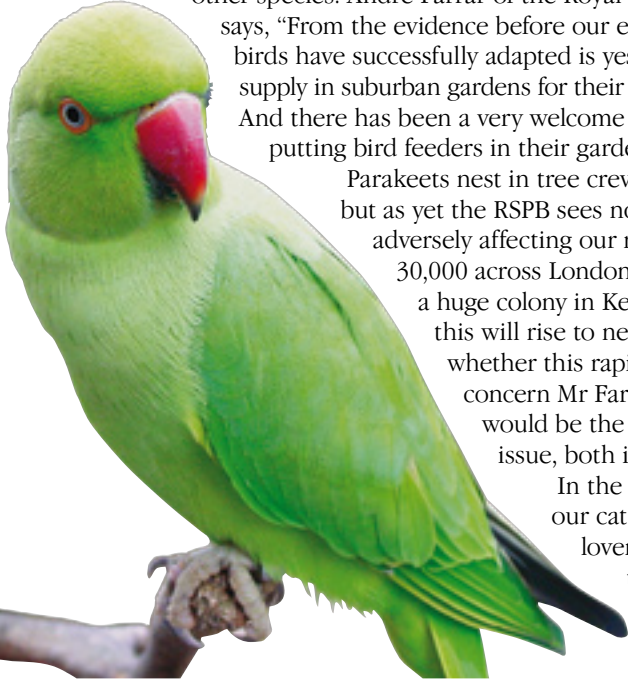
featuring Deborah Warland

Last Sunday we were having a family get-together and I was just in the middle of completing the crucial finishing touches to the roast lunch, when one of our younger guests ran into the kitchen shouting, “Auntie Deborah, someone’s parrot has escaped and it’s on your bird feeder!” I speedily dropped my domestic activities and hurried to the window overlooking the garden, picking up my binoculars and bird book (yes the secret is out, I am a twitcher, albeit not of the Bill Oddie open-toed sandal brigade).

Sure enough there was this gloriously green coloured bird with a magnificent red beak, tucking into the seeds in our squirrel-proof feeder. With my handy tome at the ready I was soon able to ascertain that this was a parakeet, or more precisely a ring-neck parakeet. My young niece and I decided to venture outside to get a better view of this exotic apparition, only to see it fly off into the top of our very tall pear tree where it was joined by three more of it’s friends. Once they were all assembled it was very difficult to spot them as their greenery merged into the colour of the tree’s leaves, but we knew they were there by the highly distinct shrieking which followed, unlike the sound of any other bird I had ever heard in the UK.

After our guests had left I decided to become ‘a parakeet anorak’ for an hour or so and went to discover more. The last time I had seen a parakeet was in Oman, so my first question was ‘what are they doing in London when they could be sunbathing in warmer climes?’. In fact the parakeet is native to India and originates from the foothills of the Himalayas where the weather is not that warm so our climate is not a problem.

The other factors which dictate their survival here are food supply and competition from other species. Andre Farrar of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds says, “From the evidence before our eyes, the answer to whether these birds have successfully adapted is yes. There is a stable and reliable food supply in suburban gardens for their diet of seeds, berries, fruit and nuts. And there has been a very welcome increase in the number of people putting bird feeders in their gardens.”



Parakeets nest in tree crevices, like woodpeckers or starlings, but as yet the RSPB sees no strong evidence that they are adversely affecting our native birds. The population is about 30,000 across London – mostly in South London (including a huge colony in Kew Gardens). The RSPB estimates that this will rise to nearly 50,000 by 2010. Questioned as to whether this rapid population growth may be of concern Mr Farrar said, “Competition for resources would be the main threat. But this is a much wider issue, both in the UK and globally.”

In the meantime I am delighted to say that our cat Claude and I, (he is an avid bird lover himself and far too lazy these days to actually pursue any of them), are making the most of watching these beautiful and exotic arrivals to our garden in Southway.

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