

Farewell to an old friend

Families living in one of those charming crescents in Temple Fortune Lane have always enjoyed this magnificent tree. They were dismayed to discover that it was diseased and a threat to the safety of children playing beneath. A fungal infection had ravaged the core of the tree and after two surveys by landowners Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, the community finally accepted that it had to be cut down.

The Trust's Estate Manager Nick Packard said: "The houses were built in a crescent around the tree. Obviously it's very sad for the residents who've had it there all their lives."

The reassuring presence of the tree seemed to embrace the close-knit community in Temple Fortune Lane, said longstanding resident David Baker. "It meant a lot to everybody. At Christmas, people would drape fairy lights on it and in the summer there would be fetes on the grass and football and cricket in the shade."

"I'll always remember its fantastic canopy and beautiful shape, and coming home on a hot day to a lovely shady garden."

After farewell toast and final hug of the tree by the Green Team, eight-year-old Natasha Dein, of one of the six families in the crescent, read poems dedicated to happy times playing under its branches.

Her 10-year-old brother Abe solemnly played the last post on his trumpet, before tears rolled for some as the tree surgeons cut the first branch.

"The rot was evident at the base of the four-metre long butt, with soft, wet patches where you could push your finger in. I took the opportunity to count the growth rings, which indicated a tree at least 250 years old" says Jeff Segal the cabinet maker called

in to cut the wood into useable planks. He tells the full story on www.jeffsegalworkshop.co.uk

Some of the timber will now be made into a bench to mark the spot where the tree stood. "We didn't want it to be the end," said David Baker, an amateur wood turner, who will make wooden bowls and furniture out of some of the timber. "This is our way of introducing a little bit of poetry into our lives."



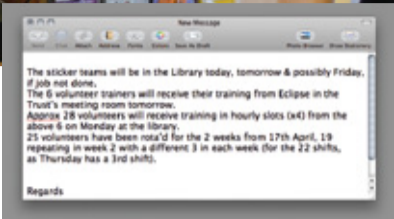
Annemount School pupils, who keep their eyes open during regular walks round the Suburb produced this model of houses in Holne Chase.



A Residents Association Open Forum heard from our MP Mike Freer, seen here with RA chairman Janet Elliott, what it was like to go from leader of the Council to a back bench MP.



A leaked email seems to us to give something of the atmosphere, and the work involved, of the taking over of the library by RA volunteers. Above some of them learning the ropes before the opening on April 17.



Eileen Bhavsar (left), the Head Teacher at Garden Suburb Junior School rings the school bell to start off a special Edwardian classes day, one of many events scheduled over the year to mark the centenary of the Schools.



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PHOTO NIGEL SUTTON