

# Richard J Wakefield

The following two tributes were delivered by Ian Tutton and Peter Metcalfe at the service held in Richard's memory on 4 November 2014 at St Jude's.

They have kindly allowed Suburb News to reproduce them in full so their words can be shared by a wider audience.

## An Appreciation

"At present we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but one day we shall see face to face..." (1 Cor. 13, 12a). "...Where I am, you may be also..." (John 14, 3c).

I regard it an extraordinary privilege to be asked to take part in this service, and I am particularly grateful to Jocylene and the family for giving me this opportunity. It goes without saying that not one of us is able to do justice to the life of Richard Wakefield, and no doubt many of you have me at an advantage as you are likely to have known him for much longer than I, and would have had much greater involvement with him. Nevertheless, I trust that in my recollection of the all too brief time that I had to get to know Richard, I will find myself striking a chord with your more wide ranging memories of him. Richard first introduced himself to me on the telephone, not long after we had moved to the Suburb. He wanted to come and take my photograph for *Suburb News* as a way of introducing the new minister at the Free Church to the wider community. This he duly did, and in so doing demonstrated that it is perfectly possible to 'make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'; the camera may never lie, but in Richard's hands, at the very least it was made to embellish the truth. First impressions count for a lot, and that is how I will remember him; he and his camera rarely parted. If it was at all possible Richard attended the various celebrations, anniversaries, exhibitions, concerts and other special events held in the Free Church; he would take photographs and make sure at least one was published. Rather poignantly, next Saturday will be the first occasion in my time that Richard will not be present, with his camera, at our Church Bazaar. In fact, as I became increasingly familiar with life on the Suburb, it was as if everywhere I went I found myself tripping over the name of Richard Wakefield; it was as if every time there was a suggestion made, an idea floated, a proposal to be considered, an issue to be addressed, a controversy to be debated, a decision to be taken that affected life on the Suburb, Richard would be involved. He knew his own mind; he was a clear thinker, a straight talker, someone who was entirely

transparent as far as the opinions he expressed, the arguments he put forward, and the decisions with which he either agreed or disagreed were concerned. We weren't always on the same side of the argument, but at least he made it easy to disagree with him. I knew where I was with Richard.

During the short time he and I were together as members of the Council of the Residents' Association, that was an education in itself. Richard was content to listen to a range of opinions on any subject under discussion; he was rather less contented when different people felt it necessary to express the same opinion for what he no doubt imagined was just for the sake of it. He would sit in the corner of the room, doodling, gently rolling his eyes back and forth, until he could stand it no more before intruding back into the discussion in a way that left no one in any doubt that he was by now extremely exasperated. Yet for all that, it is without doubt that both the Suburb Trust, and the Residents' Association owe Richard an enormous debt of gratitude in respect of his commitment, devotion, and sheer hard work in ensuring that what needed to be done got done. Perhaps most strikingly illustrated by, on the one hand his sense of fair play that saw him resign from the Trust board because he felt the way charges were being levied was unjust, yet his still being willing to submit himself for re-election, and together with his fellow trustees at the time, to do what was necessary to ensure the Trust's financial position was secured for the sake of all its charge-payers; and this in spite of vociferous and sometimes deeply unpleasant criticism from those who took an opposing view.

His immediate tangible legacy to us as a community is *Suburb News*; the completion of the latest edition Richard was able to oversee, and the Gallery, serving as both a show case and a shop window for talented local artists; we owe it to Richard to ensure that both are enabled to flourish in the future.

It seemed that throughout his whole life, duty and responsibility were his watchwords, and at times it seemed that Richard allowed himself to be overwhelmed by

the demands being made of him. Richard had been very ill for a number of years; it is likely that none but those closest to him knew just how ill he was, but he refused to give in; what had to be done had to be done whatever. He was driven by duty, that sense of responsibility, and at times managed to drive others up the wall as a consequence, but such was his life and he was determined to live it to the last as he had always lived, reinforced by duty and responsibility, underpinned by faith; a faith that was undemonstrative, a faith that worked itself out in devotion to and service of all he

held most dear. The briefest of conversations with his immediate family is enough to make anyone realise that he was very much loved as a father, and as a husband and their sense of loss is obvious to all. Richard was, and is irreplaceable. As such he will be most sorely missed by us all. The community that is the Suburb will always and forever owe him a huge debt of gratitude, one that is beyond repaying; but may be, having known Richard, he would not want us to feel in any way indebted to him, rather to accept his giving of himself for what it was, a gift.

REV DR IAN TUTTON

## A reflective snapshot

Today we have all come together to celebrate the life of a closest friend, Richard beloved for 70 years that as time took its course enabled us to become like brothers, able to pick up the threads of our diverse lives as if they had occurred yesterday.

Our first encounter in 1942 came about as pupils of Leas House Prep School, Kingsley Way – Richard aged 7 years and yours truly a little older at 8 years.

As the years passed at Leas House a mutual unspoken agenda took hold between us 'does school work really matter' which inevitably lead to Middleton-Evans – the Headmaster writing separately to our long suffering parents in the late forties 'your sons are only fit to become gardeners'; a duty we were both assigned from time to time to do within the school grounds.

Richard you became the head gardener, I followed as the apprentice – naturally!

I think we can say, Richard, that the art teacher at Leas House School came to our aid and fate granted us entry to the Willesden College of Art – you with Fleet Street Wakefields beckoning via graphic design and I mesmerised by 1951 Festival of Britain design.

That same year granted our wish to cycle from London to relatives of my family living in Freiburg, Germany – christening I believe our mutual life long love for exploration and travel. I recall Richard vividly, even today the consternation writ large on both our faces as we disembarked at Ostend in

Belgium to discover – what are they saying?

I was so privileged when you asked me to become the best man at your marriage to Jocylene 40+ years ago. Your choice of the Guildhall in the City of London was of course, as usual an in-style venue. It enhanced the dignity, joy and pleasure of that happy occasion for all and sundry.

Your gift in 2010 of Leo Tolstoy's novel 'Resurrection' first published in 1947, given I came to realise as a cultural awareness companion for the duration of the ten day journey across Russia, has taken on a truly precious status. A snapshot here for us:

"Nekhlúdov endeavoured to forget all this, to close his eyes to it, but he had lost the power. Although he could not see the source of the light which lay that night over Petersburg, and although the light itself seemed dim, obscure and unnatural, he now could not help seeing what that light revealed, and he felt both happy and disturbed."

As the second apprentice gardener, your gift does so neatly slip into my jacket pocket.

Richard, your wonderful 70 years of generosity, loyalty, integrity, jokey company and winding-up humour laced with that quiet quixotic smile of yours lives within me, all are in a state of constant recall and will remain so for my remaining years.

PETER METCALFE



CESAR RODRIGUEZ-DURAN

## Richard and the Suburb

In her own lifetime – and she died 70 years ago – Dame Henrietta was already disappointed in her creation. In fact, all the institutions she designed to foster a common social purpose failed; her school is largely populated by pupils from off the suburb, the educational Institute is gone, Fellowship House is a shadow of what she hoped for it, The Tea House is entirely private, the numbers attending Suburb churches are low and the Suburb has no coherent, integrated social character. The groups of social interest, educational, professional, recreational, commercial, religious and ethnic, are often only feebly interconnected, few of them are co-extensive and most are not centred on the Suburb. Kathleen Slack has described how Henrietta's dream "was fading even before her own eyes".

Richard Wakefield's life on the Suburb was simply a defiance of these facts. If it were actually the case that Henrietta Barnett's great idea had slowly dissolved in the face of the recalcitrant facts of social change, nobody had told him. Richard was a ubiquitous force that persisted in treating every aspect of life on the Suburb as if it were the manifestation of Henrietta Barnett's purpose.

Richard's life's work would not have been complete if he had not served on the Council of the Trust. He had worked with or for all the most important social organisations on the Suburb and his service as a Trustee from 2005 to 2011 brought all his experience to bear on the body which preserved the material framework of the Suburb; perhaps the most permanent and most completely fulfilled of all Henrietta Barnett's intentions.

He was first elected as a residential Trustee in 2005. It was a critical time. The Trust was financially and administratively weak and could neither fight its cause in the courts nor manage its estates effectively. Radical reforms were needed. Because the Trust knew that the review and reform of the Trust would

not be universally popular it had announced its intention of petitioning the Lands Tribunal (then the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal) to adjust the incidence of the Management Charge so that it was related to the various values (at that time from £150,000 to £17,000,000) of the properties on which it was levied. Inexplicably the Trust changed its mind and decided to devote considerable resources to resisting any such change. Richard was not a seeker of publicity; he valued loyalty and could be relied upon to think before he spoke. But he resigned from the Trust as a matter of principle.

Although the action for the change failed, the strength of the sentiment behind it altered the direction of the Trust, and brought about a fundamental change in the residents' representation on the Council. In 2007 Richard was one of the four returned unopposed to a Council now committed to a thorough review and reformation of all aspects of its affairs.

Richard was his own man and held strong views on the Suburb very firmly. During his time on the Trust, Trustees were not always united in their view of the policies to be adopted and Richard's was never a voice to be taken for granted. But once debated and agreed, whatever his misgivings, Richard was steadfast in his support of decisions.

In these trying times Richard energetically rallied support against Trustee candidates whose avowed intention was the enfeeblement or overthrow of the Trust and his presence on the Council was a reassurance to members that the purposes of the changes introduced were constructive and were achieved against the carefully conservative management of funds. He served the Suburb selflessly and well.

Richard always had a glint in his eye. It could be a humorous sparkle but was sometimes much closer to what is to be found in the eye of an eagle.

ANGUS WALKER



Richard, tending the guinea pig



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