

# An Extraordinary Journey – Fellowship presents its ‘Desert Island Discs’



Sally Botterill & Hilda Williams

Had Fellowship House saved the best until last? The final Weekly Talk of 2016 took place before a capacity audience on December 20. Sally Botterill hosted an illustrated ‘Desert Island Discs’ style presentation of Hilda Williams’ life – an extraordinary journey from the South Atlantic to Hampstead Garden Suburb. As we know, Hilda has run Fellowship House more or less single handed for over 30 years. She was born Hilda Annie Benjamin on the remote island of St Helena in 1919, just over 100 years after the arrival of its other well known resident, Napoleon Bonaparte. We heard of family upbringing and

schooling in Jamestown, of stories of family and island life and how the Church played an important role in her early years (nowadays Hilda is a staunch member of St Jude’s). She chose for her first record a rendering of ‘The Day of Resurrection’, a hymn she loved singing with her brothers in the choir of St James Church, Jamestown.

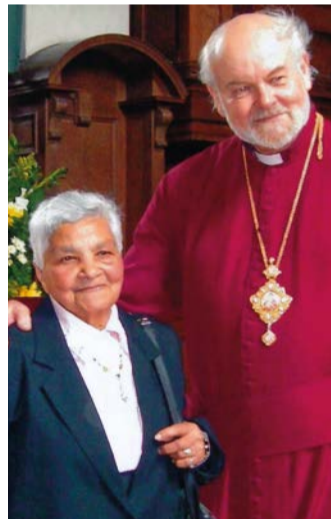
In 1936 the Bishop of St Helena received from a wealthy resident of Stellenbosch, in South Africa’s Western Cape Province, a request for a cook and parlour maid. He passed this on to Hilda. So it was, at the age of 17, equipped with her new British passport, she left for Cape

Town, a week’s sailing on the ‘Gloucester Castle’. Domestic duties at Stellenbosch took up the first two years in South Africa. She then married Albert Williams in 1938 and moved a few miles down the road to embark on a new career – child bearing and caring. Eight children were the fruit of the union. Two sadly died in infancy. After Albert’s sudden death in 1961, Hilda went back to work to make ends meet, taking first a clerical job and then working as a waitress in a nearby luxury hotel.

Favourite records were chosen and played to accompany the unfolding of this story – from ‘Ramona’ by the Bachelors through to ‘Autumn Leaves’ by Nat King Cole by way of Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong and Sarah Vaughan.

With all the children now grown up and independent, Hilda decided to embark on the next step of her journey and in 1975 arrived in London to take up a new housekeeping post. This was with the Berman family, owners of a film costumier business. For five years, moving between their homes in Mayfair, Sussex and Cannes, Hilda did everything from darned Mr Berman’s socks to meeting the rich and famous. A handwritten note to her from Gregory Peck appeared on the screen.

The Suburb was eventually reached in 1980 when she came to join her brother who was caretaker at the Institute. Hilda,



Hilda & Bishop of London on his 2011 visit to St Jude’s



1930’s schoolgirls at Sunday market St Helena



First British passport

now living at the Homestead off Erskine Hill, took up employment with the Institute and also cooked for the staff at Waitrose in Temple Fortune.

In 1984 she started taking on duties at Fellowship House. Soon she was busy organising everything to ensure the smooth running of the building.

80 years after the choral singing on St Helena, Hilda is still singing – whilst at work in Fellowship House, in the Suburb choir and as a member of the St Jude’s congregation. She obliged us with a touching unaccompanied version of ‘Memories’.

In answer to the traditional ‘Desert Island Discs’ questions, Hilda expressed confidence that she would cope on a desert island. The Bible would provide sufficient reading material and her luxury item was a cassette player with plenty of musical cassettes and spare batteries.

Thanks were expressed for allowing us a glimpse into a long and accomplished life. Hilda is a phenomenon and an inspiration – highly intelligent, hard working, self-sufficient, and mentally and physically tough.

Finally, Sally read out a tribute written in 2003 by Eileen Whelan, Fellowship’s recent benefactor and former Chairman. “If Fellowship House belongs to anyone, it belongs to Hilda. She cleans and polishes, tends our plants, prepares the place for various activities, lets groups of users in and out at all times of the day and night and generally keeps us all on our toes.”

The best until last.

SALLY BOTTERILL

# Archer and Woodhouse join forces

The Archer Academy and Woodhouse College are delighted to announce the development of a partnership which will create opportunities for both partners, and a clear 11-18 pathway for Archer Academy students.

The decision will see the Academy and College working closely together to enhance their provision across a range of areas, such as leadership and development, resource and best practice sharing, curriculum development and moderation.

The partnership also means that any Academy students who meet the expected criteria for their courses will be given priority admission to Year 12 at the College. The two student bodies will undertake a number of joint ventures together, providing opportunities for enrichment, leadership and transition which will benefit both groups.

Lucy Harrison, the Archer Academy’s headteacher, said “I am thrilled to be entering into a strong, long-term partnership with Woodhouse College, an

outstanding sixth form college which shares our supportive approach to education and personal growth, both inside and outside of the classroom.

“I know our students will be an asset to Woodhouse College community and look forward to watching them progress to this next stage in their educational careers.”

John Rubinstein, principal of Woodhouse College, echoed her comments, saying: “I am delighted to be starting this partnership with the Archer Academy. I have been following the development of the school with great interest and am hugely impressed with what I have seen of the energy and innovation of both students and staff.

I am confident that this partnership will greatly enhance our ability to prepare our students for adult life.”

For further details please contact the Archer Academy at info@thearcheracademy.org.uk, 8365 4110 or Woodhouse College at enquiries@woodhouse.ac.uk or 8445 1210.



Ian Phillips, Jon Rubinstein, Lucy Harrison, Mike Freer MP and Avis Johns

## WORDSEARCH

Obviously, we couldn’t miss the United States presidential election in the Suburb News! In this issue we have concealed the names of 20 presidents of the US (one of them is highlighted to start you off). Names may be read in all directions, straight or diagonally. Please send your entries by email to cristina.lago@gmail.com with your name and contact details. The closing date is March 17. All correct entries go into a draw to win a £20 voucher from our independent local shop Joseph’s Bookstore. Good luck!

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### AUTUMN WORDSEARCH ANSWERS, FACTS & WINNER

The answers to the last issue’s Holidays Wordsearch were as follows: Ridvan, Diwali, Carnival, Vesak, Epiphany, Lohri, Holi, Purim, Eid al-Fitr, Kwanzaa, Halloween, Ramayana, Lailat al Miraj, Easter, Shavuot, Ramadan, Obon, Meskel, Advent, Hanukkah and Thanksgiving. Did you know...?

- Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by professor, activist and author Maulana Karenga as the first specifically African-American holiday.
- Ridvan is the holiest Bahá’í festival, and is also referred to as the ‘Most Great Festival’ and the ‘King of Festivals’.
- Holi, the Hindu festival of colours, signifies the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring, end of winter, and for many a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships, and is also celebrated as a thanksgiving for a good harvest.

B. S. is the winner of the Joseph’s Bookstore £20 voucher: congratulations! Thank you also to all of you who sent your answers, keep participating.

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