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## The end of an era as home for victims of Nazi persecution closes

OTTO SCHIFF HOUSE, the home on the corner of Netherhall Gardens and Nutley Terrace which was established in the 1950s to care for victims of Nazi persecution, is to close towards the end of this year – as soon as the 16 remaining residents have been rehoused.

Seven of these residents who meet the original criteria of the Schiff bequest will go to the new 'state of the art' Jewish Care facility in Golders Green when it opens in August. The remaining nine will be rehoused by other Jewish community associations or by Camden or Westminster Councils.

The main reason for the closure is that the building has serious settlement problems, which cannot be resolved without vacant possession. "We have applied temporary solutions," Otto Schiff Housing Association (OSHA) chairman Ashley Mitchell told *NNA News*, "but essentially the house needs major underpinning, which would mean far too much noise and disruption for residents."

### Trauma

Because their average age is now about 83 or 84, with a number of them over 90, "it would not be easy to get them out in a hurry, should major cracks open up," Mitchell added. And the trauma of any sort of temporary move, even if suitable accommodation could be found short term, would clearly be too disorientating for frail and elderly people.

Also, he said, such people "need and expect much higher standards in the way of facilities than that building can now provide." Not least, while a lift leads to the top two floors, the site is split-level and some of the flats are approached by steps. Plus, of course, as the residents

age, they may need more care than mere sheltered housing can provide.

The closure also ties in with the winding up of the Association itself. Its key client group is inevitably diminishing, says Mitchell, and, while the criteria were relaxed to take in Holocaust survivors and other Jewish people, "other charities are now better equipped to meet their needs more effectively."

Other OSHA homes, notably in The Bishops Avenue, East Finchley, have already been sold and the residents rehoused.

## Netherhall's triple whammy a 'blip', say police

THE THREE Netherhall Gardens burglaries which took place around mid-day over three days in March (17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>) are all thought to have been committed by one man and have therefore been described by police as a 'blip' in an area where the crime rate is relatively low compared with three years ago and with other parts of Hampstead.

The man in question was arrested and detained the following month. He has since been sentenced to 15 months imprisonment.

Police said the culprit had admitted to two of the three incidents and was suspected of the third. He had also owned up to a further four such crimes, making a total of six in the area. He claimed he stole to feed his drug habit. But police say he was a professional burglar and was caught because he cut himself during one of the break-ins and was traced through his DNA.

A meeting of local neighbourhood watch associations at the end of April



Photo: Martin Freeman

▲ Otto Schiff House, 14 Netherhall Gdns

Both Mitchell and the employees of the Industrial Dwellings Society (IDS), which took over the day-to-day management of the Hampstead house in 2003, emphasise their awareness of the

*continued on page 2*

was told that he had picked properties that looked vulnerable and were all empty at the time. They were all at the Fitzjohn's Avenue end of the road.

One of the properties was next door to building works, which had been used as cover, while another was a flat entered at the back via a driveway and garage.

Some residents raised the issue of employing private security services to patrol the neighbourhood, but police stressed that these were by no means the whole answer and that individual home security was a priority. Measures such as ensuring gates are closed and bushes cut back (to make hiding out harder) can make a considerable difference, the neighbourhood watch meeting was told.

### Car crime

The Froggnal and Fitzjohns Safer Neighbourhood Team is urging people to be extra vigilant with regard to their cars, as a number of motor crimes have been experienced in Froggnal recently.

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NNA NEWS<sup>©</sup> welcomes news stories, announcements of events and ideas for articles. We will also accept a small amount of paid advertising. Please contact Susanne Lawrence, 47b Netherhall Gardens NW3 5RJ. Telephone: 020 7435 4140 [susannelawrence@gmail.com](mailto:susannelawrence@gmail.com)

## NEW MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY SOUGHT

After many years in the job Jenny White is seeking a successor – or at the very least some help. Duties include membership renewals – recording subscriptions received, forwarding money to the Treasurer and sending out new membership cards – and, above all, updating the database regularly. Anyone interested should contact Jenny on 020 7794 5886.

## Pat and Ronnie Whitehouse

We reported in our December 2009 newsletter on the case of Pat and Ronnie Whitehouse and the flat of which Mrs Whitehouse is a tenant. We accept that a number of facts were incorrect, that we had omitted to include much of the background to the case and that the case was presented in an unbalanced way and we apologise unreservedly for the distress caused to the landlords, Dr A L Lee and her siblings.

We further accept that there has never been any intention to demolish the main building next door in order to build new flats or to sell the building for someone else to do this.

## Closure of Otto Schiff House

*continued from page 1*

challenges they face. “Moving is a stressful experience for anyone. But nobody likes *having* to leave their home,” said Mitchell, “let alone elderly people with disturbing memories.

“We really are trying to deal with this as sensitively as possible. Inevitably we will make some mistakes, but we are doing our best to get everyone rehoused in more modern facilities. And we guarantee none of them will be out of pocket as a result,” he added.

Unfortunately, the move is happening rather more quickly than residents were initially led to expect. “There are actually 23 flats in the house (19 one-bedroom flats and four bedsitters) and we haven’t been reletting them for the past year,” IDS’s chief executive Paul Westbrook told us. But the closure had to be speeded up to take advantage of the offer of the Jewish Care places in Golders Green, which are in great demand.

OSHA is a major donor to this new facility, which will combine assisted living with a nursing home, and part of the building will be renamed in memory of Otto Schiff.

## Family connections



▲ Otto Schiff

Born in Frankfurt in May 1875 to a distinguished Jewish family, Otto M Schiff came to London at the age of 21 to seek his fortune. Thanks to significant family connections, he was able to get into banking and soon set up his own stockbroking firm. Thereafter, according to a paper in the Leo Baeck Institute Year Book,\* he devoted “most of his adult life to philanthropic and communal work,” and played “a unique leading role on behalf of refugees in both world wars.”

Schiff had no children, left no memoirs and his personal papers were destroyed when his London office was bombed during the Blitz. However, his late secretary, Joan Stiebel, herself active in refugee work, made materials available to the authors of the paper. One “may surmise,” they write, “that Schiff’s own experience of immigration would have given him insight into the challenges faced by aliens, most without his advantages, trying to make their way in Great Britain, proverbial for a certain cultural insularity.”

Schiff seems to have acted as a very effective middle-man. “Schooled in the old banking tradition of quiet discretion,” he established invaluable links with the Home Office, but was accused by some of “toadying” to the British Government, as his concerns about the risks of anti-Semitism if Jewish immigration was too large or abrupt were said to mirror those of the officials with whom he dealt.

Nevertheless, immediately after the war he did much to facilitate the admission of about 750 orphan children who had survived Buchenwald and Bergen Belsen, a project “fraught with political, logistical and medical difficulties”.

He was awarded a CBE in June 1939. Sadly, the war years took their toll on his health and he died in London in November 1952 of cardiac arrest.

Over half a century after the house in Netherhall Gardens was commemorated in his name, “his personal role in facilitating the admission to Britain of nearly 80,000 refugees from Nazi persecution remains his monument.”

\*A. J. Sherman and Pamela Shatzkes, ‘Otto M. Schiff (1875–1952), *Unsung Rescuer*’, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 2009*, 54(1), 243–271, Oxford University Press.

Photo of Otto Schiff courtesy of Pamela Shatzkes

# Building blight

*Long gone are the days when 'doing up' a house meant consulting a paint colour card or two and choosing new carpets and curtains, says Joseph Connolly*

Photo: Martin Freeman



◀ 59 Netherhall Gardens this May

Before we were all deluded into believing that Hampstead land was worth a potentate's coffer of gold and dazzling gemstones (per square bloody inch), people would, strange to relate, be able to buy a house for less than the wealth of a minor principality, whereupon they would embark upon a bit of what was then rather sweetly called 'doing it up'.

This involved perusal of the Dulux colour card, a nice bit of carpet, a trip to the Electricity Board, a couple of planks from the wood yard in Kentish Town, and possibly a set of net curtains for the bathroom that's overlooked. Your next-door neighbours didn't even know you were there – the slapping on of emulsion and the installation of a few Swish curtain rails rarely necessitating heavy plant and pneumatics.

Now, though, people seem to buy, for no more than a handful of millions, houses they intrinsically dislike the look of.

So, first to go are the roof, all extraneous walls, any distinctive architectural features and the garage (of course), just prior to obliterating under an unconvincing camouflage any remaining vestige of the building's original identity. Then, on the eve of excavation and three years of mind-rotting hell for everyone within earshot, all that is still standing on the site is shifted very slightly to the left.

This now is as regular as the changing of the seasons. It is hardly even remarked upon. Which is rather why I thought I might remark on it.

*Postscript:* I well remember when the Maresfield Gardens house that now is the Freud Museum was being renovated. I wrote about it in *The Times*, largely because I was surprised to see the soaring chimneystacks summarily truncated – of which action I felt sure that Sigmund might have something to say. I stood there and watched as the resulting rubble was dumped into a Freudian skip. **NNA**



*Joseph Connolly is restaurant critic of the Ham & High. His latest novel is 'Jack the Lad and Bloody Mary', Faber and Faber, £8.99.*

**I**DON'T think NNA members need to be told that there are a great many upsides to living in this cosy little Netherhall, Nutley and Maresfield enclave of ours, but there is as well one hell of a downer: and that, naturally, is builders. It's not just here, of course – any decent area (and, according to estate agents, there are no longer any indecent ones) is similarly and endlessly afflicted.

And for all our collective suffering at their far from silent hands, by definition a good few members and neighbours must ultimately be responsible for this eternal invasion, for I am assuming that swarms of builders do not as a result of an airy caprice arbitrarily descend, like so many plagues of locusts. Having said that, the leading culprits do often appear to be absentee landlords, expatriates or cannily anonymous developers with chubby fingers and thumbs in many London pies.

Refurbishment disease can strike at any time, because in common with bacteria it is – even in sanitary surroundings – always creepily lurking, poised and eager to infect and overrun.

So even if this time around you are lucky enough not to be in the front line of a serious onslaught – as initially signalled by ominous plywood hoardings, then a cluster of portable lavatories and finally diggers seemingly intent on boring the NW3 clay into its volcanic and unstable core – then still you will surely fall victim to the slightly

more distant rumble and drone of heavy machinery, the maddening beep of reversing fork-lifts and the tinny and insistent plinking of Radio One.

Should you now be looking forward to summer in the garden, and should you also be close to a major redevelopment involving subterranean swimming pools, cinemas, gymnasias, nuclear shelters, sunken rocket silos, Ernst Stavro Blofeld's catacomb of diabolic weaponry, not to say an express and satanic lift-shaft directly down into the pit of Hades ... then summer in the garden, alas, may safely be forgotten.

## Good old days?

And, hard though it is to believe, it was not ever thus. I was born in Fitzjohn's Avenue in what is now St Anthony's prep school and in those days was a private maternity hospital. I later was sent to St Anthony's as a short-trousered pupil where I held the proud and one would imagine unique distinction of being Pencil Sharpener Monitor in the upper floor room where first I drew breath. In those days we lived in the England's Lane area, and later I progressed to The Mount Square behind Heath Street.

However, I have roosted in my Netherhall aviary for just about 30 years now, and can attest that building as an extreme no-holds-barred and long-haul effort on the level of all-out war is a relatively recent and hideous blight.

# Joined by a lifelong musical thread

*She's a sculptor, photographer and filmmaker; he went from being an industrial lawyer to a management academic. But they are best known locally for their Cavatina Trust which brings chamber music to young people. Ruth and Richard Stone\* went to meet them*

ONE OF the joys of living in Hampstead is to find out about the varied routes that people have taken to get here and the journey that brought Pamela and Simon Majaro to Maresfield Gardens is as interesting as most.

Pamela came from Llanelli in South Wales in the 1950s to read law at University College London (UCL). Simon came from Jerusalem to take the same course. But they met first at a tea party in Golders Green, and married within six months of graduating.

Thereafter they lived in North West London – Wembley, Stanmore and St John's Wood – before moving to Hampstead (Frognaal Gardens) in 1975 and Maresfield in 1996.

Simon was born in Jerusalem where he developed an early interest in woodwork. This eventually led to him becoming a skilled violin-maker. "When I was about 14," he says, "my father was concerned I might get into mischief in the long summer holidays. He told me the local carpenter was looking for an assistant for £1 a week. I sharpened tools and learnt to use them and made tea. Years later I found out my father had paid the carpenter £2 a week to take me on!"

His father, Leon, was a doctor from Odessa in what was then southern Russia, now the Ukraine. During the 1914-18 War, he had served on the Turkish front where soldiers were dying by the thousands of typhus. When he was demobbed, his father wrote saying: "Don't come back because the Bolsheviks have arrived and it's going to be bad, bad, bad!"

He arrived in Jaffa in Palestine and succumbed to typhus himself. Two months in the Jewish Hospital there saved his life and also introduced him to the renowned Rokach family. Shimon Rokach was one of the founders of Tel Aviv and his son Israel went on to become its mayor. However, it was Shimon's daughter Hannah who was the main attraction for Leon and the couple soon married. His hobby was playing the violin and Hannah was an accomplished



Photo: Nigel Sutton

▲ The Majaros: from Jerusalem and Llanelli to Maresfield Gardens

pianist, so it was inevitable that their son Simon would be brought up to the sound of the Beethoven violin and piano sonatas they played together.

Living under the British mandate, from the age of eight Simon added English to the French, Hebrew and Arabic that he already spoke. He began his law studies in the British Law School in Jerusalem, but it closed down when the Mandate ended a year later. University College London became his natural destination.

When he graduated, Simon became fascinated with the potential of new industries based on technologies developed during the Second World War. He began a career in British corporate law as legal adviser to the plastics firm which produced Fablon. He was soon promoted to the Board, and steered a buy-out of the company by Unilever.

He then persuaded Unilever to second him to Geneva to study for an MBA, and it began to dawn on him that he would prefer not to work for a large institution with 300,000 employees. So, when his Swiss university invited him to return as a lecturer, he jumped at the chance to develop a new career.

After a decent time, he left Unilever and began to make his mark as an academic in the world of management. Even when he joined Cranfield University as Professor of Marketing, he continued working as a management

*'Many people have innovative ideas, but these need to be managed effectively'*

consultant for Urwick Orr (later bought out by Price Waterhouse). His particular specialism was the management of creativity and innovation.

"It's about harnessing creativity," he explains. "Many people have innovative ideas, but these need to be managed effectively, whether in business or the public sector."

Recalling a Cabinet Office initiative to train top industrialists and senior civil servants together, he says: "The gap in understanding and possessing management skills between the two groups was staggering. The senior civil servants I met were all academically

outstanding: bright, articulate and easily stimulated. Yet I would be reluctant to ask most of them to run a business with my money. The same applies to the politicians I met and worked with.

“The reality is that politicians and civil servants need to manage national financial and human resources which exceed those of even the largest corporations. I would not allow anybody to become a Government Minister, Councillor or even an MP unless they had a business school degree and had worked in industry, commerce or finance.”

**P**amela’s family came to Llanelli from Lithuania, but not directly, as both parents were born in the UK. Her mother’s family arrived in Wales in the 1890s and indeed Pamela reckons her maternal grandfather was probably the only Jewish miner in the country.

Her father, who was born in Plymouth, joined his sister in the drapery business in Llanelli in the 1920s and by the time of the Second World War both siblings were able to provide ‘homes from home’ for British and American servicemen, and also evacuees and Jewish refugees from the Nazis.

One of the latter was a young Austrian ‘wunderkind’ pianist, who entertained the troops on her aunt’s Bechstein.

Pamela played the piano from the age of five, and also loved dancing, drama, art and sport, notably badminton.

She realised almost from the start of the UCL law course that the subject did not interest her, but it was difficult to switch in the 1950s, so she stuck with it.

After her marriage and an initial period of nest building with two daughters, she moved towards the arts and studied sculpture at Camden Arts Centre and Sir John Cass College. Near where we sat in the living room there was a beautiful bronze sculpture of a pair of hands over a keyboard. “Yes, they are my hands,” said Pamela. “I used them as my models.”

Later she took up painting, photography and photo-collage, gaining a diploma at Hertfordshire College of Art. And then she turned to film. With her friend Jean Rosefield (mother of cellist Gemma), she has interviewed and filmed several well-known musicians, and recently made a six-hour record of Simon’s life.

“Whatever she does,” Simon fondly butts in, “she does thoroughly and well.”

In the late 1980s she was invited to join the Board of the London International String Quartet Competition and this brought her into direct contact with the world of professional musicians.

She got to know many ensembles, such as the Wihan, Vellinger and Emperor quartets and others who remain close friends. While living in Frogna Gardens the Majaros started hosting concerts in aid of musicians.

As Simon approached retirement, his old love of carpentry moved to a deeper level. He enrolled on a ‘luthier’ course in Cambridge, learning how to make stringed instruments. His first violin was a copy of a 1716 Stradivarius. “Luthiers often say your first violin will be tonally the best you will ever make. So my first is my favourite, for its warm tone.”

For 20 years Simon spent every Tuesday in Cambridge, and has now created 14 instruments. When the Wihan string quartet played at Simon’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party last year, the two violins and viola used were made by him; a handsome ‘cello which he also made decorates a corner of the sitting room.

His latest instrument is an exquisite ‘pochette’, an old style violin with a narrow body, but full length with a full set of strings. The fingerboard is delicately inlaid with traditional patterns. Pochettes were carried in the pockets of dancing masters and travelling musicians, and can be seen in paintings of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

After some years of making instruments, Simon began to learn to play the violin. As he moved through the early grades, he discovered the joys of chamber music, eventually playing in a group that nicknamed themselves ‘The Academy of Ancient Musicians’.

**I**t is as though all the interests and passions of their lives together led to the founding in 1998 of the Cavatina Chamber Music Trust. Simon and Pamela both speak of their dismay that the audiences for chamber music seemed to be growing older with them. They resolved to find ways of introducing young people to its pleasures, as it is often, wrongly, considered to be at the ‘difficult’ end of concert-going.

They began with cheap ticket schemes for existing concerts, and then funded concerts in schools, as well as the highly successful concerts for young children at our own local Swiss Cottage library.

Cavatina’s work now includes chamber music competitions and master classes at Trinity College of Music; free ticket schemes at 27 venues for youngsters aged 8 to 25; and student ‘ambassadors of chamber music’ in colleges and universities. The tireless Majaros also have plans to sponsor quartet master



▲ Pamela’s photo of Simon’s pochette

classes at King’s Place, which will be open to the public.

Pamela’s role is to select quartets for outreach work in schools, and to train them to connect with children and teenagers. “The music becomes accessible through demonstration, and never through ‘dumbing down’.”

We can testify to the success of Pamela’s training: our six year-old grandson sat for an hour on a rug on the library floor with 30 other children,

*‘Our six year-old sat for an hour on a rug...transfixed by a concert of classical music’*

transfixed by a concert of classical music, with lively explanations and activities by the Sacconi Quartet.

Another local connection for Cavatina and the Majaros came about through the distinguished pianist Charles Owen, who happened to mention that he rehearsed at a concert hall in Nutley Terrace, which is almost opposite the Majaro home.

They were duly introduced to Peter Brown, Director of Netherhall House, and since then that auditorium has played a major part in the life of Cavatina. They promote concerts there, including the one for Simon’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the fine piano is a gift from the Trust, helped by some generous donors.

Cavatina is now well enough established to be sure of a place in the musical scene. Simon and Pamela plan to employ managers for each sector of the Trust’s work, and say they are “blessed with trustees who are equally passionate about the work, and who will carry it on into the future.”

As the story of their lives unfolded, it was fascinating to see how the musical thread was there from the beginning.

It was filtered through Simon’s years in management and the making of musical instruments, and through Pamela’s interest in the piano and in musicians. And it has seen its fruition in Cavatina, which aims to keep chamber music in its rightful place at the heart of music making.

**NNA**

*\*Richard Stone was awarded an OBE for public and voluntary service in the 2010 Queen’s Birthday Honours List*

# The birds and the trees

*Local gardener and environmental expert Noel Brock tackles a couple of questions that have been exercising Hampstead nature lovers recently*

**Neighbours have commented on a decrease in the number of smaller birds as a result of the increase in predators such as jays, magpies and sparrowhawks. What is the reality?**

THE picture in respect of smaller birds is a mixed one. Some species, such as long-tailed tits and goldfinches, have increased in numbers in inner London, while others, such as the house sparrow, whose decline is well known, have decreased. A number of factors account for the increase in predators.

Sparrowhawk populations in Britain and across Europe suffered a catastrophic crash in the 1960s as a result of pesticide poisoning. Since the banning of DDT (*inter alia*), they have made an excellent comeback, and are now relatively common in London and elsewhere. For many years a pair used to breed in old poplars to the east of Fitzjohn's Avenue.

The raising of a brood of young sparrowhawks must necessarily involve the deaths of many small birds, since that is their main prey.

However, the studies I have read of sparrowhawks' predation (mostly in woodland) have shown the predominant prey species to be great tits and blue tits. Anecdotally, blue tits are said to be decreasing a little, but great tits are among the commonest birds in Hampstead. Both species have two to

three broods a year, numbering half a dozen or more under good conditions, but heavy rainfall during breeding weeks can be fatal to whole broods so that would have more impact on population than predation. Moreover, studies of predator-prey populations have usually shown that predator breeding success is determined by the availability of prey, not the other way around.

Populations of magpies have also increased greatly in London in recent decades, but for reasons more complex than those for sparrowhawks and centred mostly outside the city. The huge increase in road-killed animals in the countryside has made it much easier for young magpies to survive their first winter. Also, magpies are no longer slaughtered by farmers and gamekeepers in the way they used to be. As a result of these and doubtless other factors, magpies, as major nest predators, are probably having an effect on breeding success among small birds.

## Raiding nests

Jays, also important nest predators, have not increased their numbers to the same extent, but I have often seen them raiding nests in Hampstead gardens.

However, I believe that grey squirrels and domestic cats are more important killers of small birds. Squirrels raid the nests, for both eggs and young birds, and I think everyone who owned a cat has

relieved it of a few more or less mauled young birds at the time these are taking their first clumsy flights. Grey squirrels are heavily implicated in the catastrophic population crashes of several woodland bird species – the beautiful hawfinch and the spotted flycatcher to name but two – but these birds have now declined so much that I think we can regard them as already extinct as breeders in our area. On the other hand, I have seen magpies 'working' a hedge for nesting birds. They hop, walk and fly down both sides and on top of the hedge to flush out the birds and then they rob the nests.

Magpies and jays are members of the crow family (*corvidae*), and other members of this family have been implicated in the decline or extinction of a huge range of species worldwide. For example, I have seen studies showing how crows have decimated tortoise populations in the western USA, and sociable plover populations in central Asia. In all these cases, the crow populations have increased due to human influence (providing road killed animals and garbage, for instance), and they have used their leisure time to harass the local tortoises, plovers etc.

In short, while bigger jay and magpie populations cannot be good news for small birds, other factors are significant.

I think it is important to remember that Hampstead is not a pristine wilderness. It is a part of a huge metropolis, in which a much reduced and altered flora and fauna hangs on at our whim. The last time Hampstead hosted its full primeval biodiversity was probably about 2000 years ago. Under the circumstances, I think it is to be expected that the populations of birds and mammals will fluctuate wildly under the influence of the latest new fad of human behaviour.

## An evolving scenario

Gardens and parks can be havens for wildlife, the more so in recent years when the countryside has been ravaged by chemical warfare and other hostile changes in land use. But that wildlife is new: a new assembly of plants and animals which have all learned to live alongside homo sapiens. We should resist the temptation to interfere further, as they jostle for a place among us. **NNA**

## Could the recent replacement of leaking Victorian water mains have an impact on the trees in our neighbourhood?

It is true that big trees pump a great deal of water up through their roots and out through their leaves, and it is also true that a great deal of water has been lost into the ground in recent years by leaky water mains. However, what proportion of the lost water was taken up by trees – 10 per cent? 90 per cent? No data will ever be available on where the leaks were and how much each one lost.

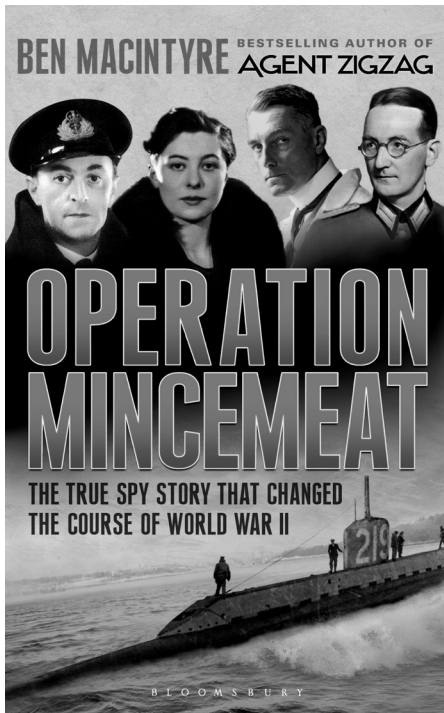
When water escapes from a pipe, above or below ground, the likely route taken by most of it will be downwards. Since most old mains are more than a yard deep, and most tree roots are active in the top two feet of soil, it seems likely that most leaking water would have

escaped downwards or sideways. However, I know from personal experience that many Hampstead gardens contain 'springs' in lawns or beds, a result of escaped water having run obliquely along an impermeable clay layer and then emerged just like a natural spring hundreds of yards away. This re-emergent water is likely to have a far more extensive irrigation effect. When leaks are stopped in these areas, clay may indeed shrink and trees suffer.

But, remember, every square meter of your Hampstead garden receives nearly a ton of rainwater in a year, so I don't think we are in serious danger from wildfires just yet.

# Macintyre makes mincemeat of British WWII spy masters

NNA AGM REPORT BY RITA CRUISE O'BRIEN



IT WAS naval intelligence officer, Ewen Montagu, a key character in best-selling spy story, *Agent Zigzag*, who led author Ben Macintyre to write his latest book, *Operation Mincemeat*.

Ben, who is also associate editor of *The Times* and lives in Netherhall Gardens, told this year's NNA AGM in March that he found Montagu's papers in an old wooden trunk under a bed in an attic. There unfolded a sensational cast of characters, the likes of which we seem to have lost, as "they did not seem to breed," according to the discussion following Ben's talk.

Montagu, who helped to mastermind 'Operation Mincemeat' in 1944, wrote a fictionalised account of the story after the war in a book entitled *The Man who Never Was*, and indeed played a bit part in the 1956 film based on it.

But it all begins with former Scotland Yard chief Basil Thomson, who wrote 18 thrillers including *The Milliner's Hat* in 1938, which was about falsified documents found on a dead body in order to perpetuate a deception. A year later Ian Fleming – of James Bond fame – was working as personal assistant to then Director of naval intelligence Admiral John Godfrey. The two men produced the so-called 'Trout Memo', a list of 51 ideas which would serve to deceive the Germans in wartime. Suggestion 17 was

to use a dead body and land it on shore with strategic information.

For four years, this remained an idea, until the XX (double cross!) Committee, in charge of double agents, brought it to life in 1943. The deception concerned the coming Allied invasion of southern Europe. The idea was to convince the Germans that the Allies would land in Greece and Sardinia rather than their true destination, Sicily.

## 'Major Martin'

Sir Bernard Spilsbury, Chief Pathologist, and Sir Bentley Purchase, Coroner of St Pancras, colluded with naval intelligence to keep an eye out for a corpse of someone who might have been an air crash victim. The body of dead vagrant Glyndwr Michael, aged 34, took on the identity of fictional Major William Martin of the Royal Marines. Dressed in uniform, he was equipped with letters from his father, a photo and gushing love letters from his fiancée, as well as suitable military intelligence identity papers. Most important, he had chained to his hand a briefcase with a chatty letter from the Commander of the British Forces in the Mediterranean to another member of the brass with false information about the coming invasion.

'Major Martin' was carried in a torpedo tube on a submarine to the

waters off southern Spain on 23 April 1944 and was picked up by a local sardine fisherman.

The subsequent deception and counter deception on the part of the Spanish, British and German intelligence officers was worthy of the Keystone Cops, Ben remarked. But finally the information was handed to the Germans by the Spanish in secret and then returned to the British without the seals having been broken. Several days later Bletchley Park picked up the information that the deception had reached Berlin.

At first sceptical, Hitler issued orders for troop movements in the wrong territories and this saved many lives on 4 July when Sicily, the actual target, was invaded in much less time than expected.

'Major Martin' was buried in the cemetery in Huelva, Spain, and, despite years of press interest, the true identity of the body was not revealed until 1996, when the relevant Government files became declassified.

The headstone in Huelva was amended to read 'Glyndwr Michael served as Major William Martin'.

Some of the characters in England and Spain were still alive to help Ben with the research. But perhaps the most enjoyment for him was reviving the wonderful cast of characters of this bygone period.

NNA

Ben Macintyre photo by Jerry Bauer



*'Operation Mincemeat: the true spy story that changed the course of World War II'* by Ben Macintyre, Bloomsbury, January 2010

## CRIME AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

WITH THE recent increase in the number of robberies and burglaries in our catchment area, Neighbourhood Watch suddenly assumes greater importance. Our watch committee (and we are always wanting new members especially in Netherhall Gardens and Nutley Terrace) is in regular touch with the Police Safer Neighbourhood team for our locality.

Of the three recent burglaries in Netherhall Gardens, which all took place more or less at the same time, at least two, and almost certainly all three, were accounted for (*see story, page 1*).

Police, both in uniform and in plain clothes, continue to patrol our streets and assure me that there is no upturn in crime in the locality. Builders' vans, however, both within and outside our area, have been broken into of late and items stolen.

Visitors to the area, in particular, are warned not to leave valuables in their cars, exposed to public gaze.

The various neighbourhood watch committees in our area continue to meet, compare experiences and suggest ways and means of mitigating the possibility of crime.

Taking steps to prevent crime is of paramount importance. Risk factors include too great a readiness to admit strangers at the door; failure to lock properties sufficiently, especially those in multiple occupation; failure to keep garden sheds locked; and an unwillingness for women in particular to conceal jewellery when out walking.

For crime prevention advice, contact PC Theresa Weston (Tel 020 8733 6605), who is very willing to help. **Hugh Isaacs**

## WHAT'S BEEN ON

### **Anthony Coles reports:**

NNA MEMBERS have been invited to a number of local events in the last few months, including our own very enjoyable Christmas reception (**17 December**) at the Freud Museum and the Annual General Meeting and reception (**2 March**) at which member, author and journalist Ben Macintyre gave a most amusing overview of his new book *Operation Mincemeat* (see report, p.7).

Mayer Hillman (NNA) and Farokh Khoroshi (Fitzjohn's Residents Association) arranged a public meeting on Camden Council's proposals relating to safety, residents' parking, parking for school minibuses, speeds and the school run (**15 December**). NNA members were welcomed to this meeting, kindly hosted by Peter Brown at Netherhall House, with coffee and mince pies which were much appreciated by all who turned out on what was a very cold night.

Our fun new year quiz with a prize of a year's free subscription to the NNA was won by member Anna Fairgreave.

Pamela and Simon Majaro again delighted our younger members with their Sunday afternoon concerts (**10 January, 7 February and 7 March**) at the Swiss Cottage Library, as well their support for the Netherhall House concerts (**8 February, 13 March, 8 May and 15 May**), courtesy of Peter Brown.

The launch of Transition Hampstead (**17 March**), a local community

initiative looking forward to positive and practical models of sustainable living (housing, vegetable gardening, recycling, environment etc) in our area, attracted many members for an evening of interesting presentations and social contacts. The organisation's first bi-monthly get together was on **8 June**.

A meeting (**28 April**) organised by Safer Neighbourhood Committees at Pax Lodge, following the recent unfortunate spate of burglaries, attracted much interest, as did for other reasons the Friends of Hampstead Town Hall meeting (**16 March**) with Michael Palin.

The Freud Museum, under its new director Carol Seigel, continues to invite NNA members to its exhibitions and the new tours of the house held on the first Sunday of every month at 12.30pm. The annual Freud Memorial lecture (on election night, **6 May**) was given by British Psychoanalytical Society President and former England cricket captain Mike Brearley on the theory and practice of leadership. On **20 May** the museum was featured in a BBC4 TV 'behind the scenes' documentary, *A night at the museum*.

And finally, under the auspices of the National Gardens Scheme, Linda and Stephen Williams held another successful open garden afternoon (**13 June**) with tea and home-made cakes. Small children enjoyed feeding and counting the fish in the pond! Proceeds to various charities.

## SITS VAC

**Volunteers with regular computer access are sought for the following:**

**Licensing:** New NNA representative required to attend and comment on licensing applications and appeals.  
*Contact: stuart.houghton@bt.com*

**Membership:** New secretary required to process renewals, maintain database and send out annual membership cards.  
*Contact: jennywhite63@gmail.com*

**Planning and conservation committee:** Professional expertise not vital but must be able to understand and comment relevantly on planning applications.  
*Contact: liam@liamconnor.com*

**Website:** Do you have or know anyone with experience of website maintenance? We urgently need someone to input updates and keep an eye on any communications that come via the site.  
*Contact: stuart.houghton@bt.com*

## IN BRIEF

- Former NNA Chair Rita Cruise O'Brien and husband Donal are leaving the area after 26 years in Netherhall Gardens. They will be much missed.
- As *NNA News* went to press, the sad news was announced of the sudden death of Martin Davies, Councillor for the Frognal and Fitzjohn's ward since 1998 and good friend to the NNA. He was 45.

## NNA MEMBERSHIP

IF YOU've not yet renewed your NNA membership, or are new to the area, please join now. It's still only £8 a household or £5 for an individual. Apart from working to maintain and/or improve the character of the environment, running social events and being 'good neighbours', we also give all paid-up members a copy of our list of trades and services providers. So please fill in this form and return it with your payment to the address below.

And if you have a new neighbour, or there are other flats in your building, please spread the word and encourage them to join or notify Membership Secretary Jenny White: *jennywhite63@gmail.com*, tel 7794 5886.

Title: ..... Forename: ..... Surname: .....

Title: ..... Forename: ..... Surname: .....

Address: .....

Tel no: ..... Mobile: ..... Email: .....

Do you have any skills or interests that could help us?.....

**I/WE ENCLOSE £.....(£5 per person or £8 per household – but, if you'd like to give more, it's always welcome)**

**Please send or deliver form and payment (cash or cheque payable to 'NNA') to the NNA Membership Secretary, Flat 3, 22 Netherhall Gardens NW3 5TH (opposite Netherhall Way)**