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Life after the bomb

In last month's issue, David Smith told the story of the 1944 bombing of Abbots Gardens that killed five people and injured many others. One resident, Maysel Houghton, was at her stove when the bomb fell and the explosion robbed her of her sight. Here, her friend June Grieve recalls how Maysel overcame her disability and went on to enjoy a happy life.

I had the pleasure of knowing Maysel Houghton in the 1980s when I gave her lifts by car to church on Sunday mornings and I shall never forget her. At the time of the bombing, she was a young woman who was recently married. Her husband had the house at 107 Abbots Gardens rebuilt in exactly the same style as the one they lost.

On meeting Maysel, you noticed her dress sense, wearing clothes in coordinated colours, her make-up and her lovely smile. The attention to detail in her appearance, and her knowledge of the layout of the world around her, were the result of her retaining her visual memory. She had favourite colours for her clothes and plants in her garden, and always checked with others that they were right.

When out and about, her main concern was always the welfare of those who were guiding her and it was hard to believe she was blind. Walking through the garden in the summer, she would ask which flowers were in bloom, touching them and taking in their fragrance. She associated many of the plants with the person who gave them to her.

Driving around Finchley, she wanted to know if anything had changed so that she could update it in her mind.

Maysel's kitchen was organised with precision to find any ingredient she needed. Seeing

her cook an evening meal once, a visitor once remarked with surprise that she was making gravy. Her reply was: "I like gravy".

She did admit once that one day a bottle of cough mixture was left in the kitchen and some of it ended up in the gravy. Visitors to her house who moved things around and didn't put them back before leaving were neither useful nor popular.

She spoke often of happy times when she went to a dancing class for blind and sighted people in Finchley. Maysel also enjoyed knitting, using instructions in Braille. The only part she could not do was sewing the garment together at the end.

Talking books gave her pleasure, especially the talking newspaper every week that gave her all the local news.

All those who met her remember her lively mind, which she kept until she died in 2002. We are glad that she touched our lives and gave us an example of how a tragedy can be overcome.

Dancing with the professionals

By Tracy Quirke

Congratulations to Bishop Douglass pupils King Appiagyei, Paul Matevicius and Auws Al-Gaboury, who performed in the curtain raiser show as part of Matthew Bourne's performance of Edward Scissorhands at Sadler's Wells theatre in January.

Story time

The Church Farm House Museum in Hendon is on the lookout for children's stories with a local connection for an exhibition to be held this summer.

The Children's Writers and Artists display, running from 23 May to 27 September, will feature famous writers and illustrators who have lived and worked in the borough. The Museum is now asking residents to come forward with any material they would be prepared to loan the exhibition or to suggest a particular published writer or artist they would like to see included.

Authors such as Oliver Postgate the creator of Bagpuss, Anthony Buckeridge, the writer of the Jennings stories, and Sydney and Betty Hulme-Beaman, creators of the hit TV and radio Toytown series are all former Barnet residents.

To contact the Church Farmhouse Museum, telephone 020 8359 3942 or email gerrard.roots@barnet.gov.uk.

Bishop Douglass pupils have been participating in Street Dance sessions as part of their partnership with Sadler's Wells for over two years.

The three boys, all in Year 9, worked intensively for four days in collaboration with pro-

fessional dancers and choreographers as part of the production and performed on stage before the penultimate show.

The students will be performing in the Barnet Dance Festival at artsdepot on Tuesday 10 March.



Bishop Douglass students King Appiagyei (right) and Paul Matevicius (left) on stage at Sadler's Wells. Photo by Tracy Quirke.

Sunshine on a cloudy day

By Sheila Armstrong

The Noble Sage's private view on 11 February of The Beating Heart of Kerala heralded a show full of the strong colours of the Kerala sunshine from six contrasting artists.

Jana Manuelpillai, owner of the contemporary Indian art gallery on Fortis Green, has been planning to bring the up-and-coming artists of Kerala to East Finchley for some time. Personally known to all the artists, he has been able to seek out Kerala's best over the last two years.

It was a great turnout for the evening showing, and Jana gave a guided tour of the exhibition, artist by artist, from the Rousseau-like Murali Nagapuzha, to the colourful Pradeep Puthoor. Using both biros and gel pens, S Ravi Shankar and T R Upendranath provide a monochrome contrast, as does the more cerebral A S Sajith's response to modern life. The exhibition also included sculpture by Ashok Patel.

The usual informative and well-produced catalogue accompanied the exhibition.

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