

Talkbac

Newsletter of Keniston Housing Association

Flying high!

Artington Close resident Keith Escott has had a lifelong passion for aircraft and flying which has taken him to exciting heights – on one occasion flying further and higher than anyone had ever done before!

As a young boy Keith grew up near to RAF Colerne in Wiltshire and was fascinated by the planes there. He used to visit the base and loved sitting in the cockpit of a Spitfire – the famous fighter plane from World War 2. Spitfires played a vital role in the Battle of Britain, which was fought over the fields of Kent in 1940 and they flew out of Biggin Hill Airport, which of course is not far from Keniston's offices.

When Keith moved to Artington Close, ten years ago, he was thrilled to discover he was so near to the famous base. He was even more thrilled to discover that the plane that he used to sit in as a child is now housed in the aircraft museum there! Keith now works as a volunteer at Biggin Hill and spends two days a week helping out.

He's hoping to put his extensive knowledge of RAF aircraft and history to even greater use soon, by qualifying as a tour guide at the museum, which houses many beautifully restored wartime planes.

One of the most exciting moments of his life happened recently, when, as a thank you for his work as a volunteer, Keith was given a flight in a Spitfire. "It was amazing" he says. "When the pilot opened up the throttle to take us up to speed for take off, the power was incredible." The pilot flew them over the Kent fields towards Sevenoaks and then handed the controls over to Keith! He said it was the most wonderful experience. "It was absolutely fantastic, and after the pilot took the controls back from me he put the plane into a victory roll – a full somersault in the sky!" Keith is no stranger to the air though. When he was younger, he was

one of the first people to fly hang gliders and even broke both the height and distance record for one of his flights. "I took the hang glider up to 4,000 feet and flew five miles completely unpowered – I was right up into the clouds" he remembers. His remarkable achievement was reported in the local paper. Later he added an engine to the hang glider to make it into a microlight and enjoyed flying it over the countryside in Wiltshire where he lived at the time. You need to be fit to fly and Keith has always kept himself fit by running. He runs at least five miles every day and more when he's in training for a 10k run which he does every year to raise money for St Christopher's Hospice. "I fully intend to keep running until I'm 80" he insists "even longer if I can."

Keith really is enjoying a marvellously full and active life, but there is still time for a more gentle pursuit – the Japanese art of bonsai. He buys very young shrubs and trees and, by expertly pruning the roots and branches, makes perfect miniatures which he keeps in his beautiful garden.

It's fascinating talking to Keith and he has some wonderful photographs, including one of him as a very young boy, sitting in the plane he now helps look after at the museum. That plane is called the Spirit of Kent and we have to say, Keith's own spirit is an inspiration to us all and we wish him all the very best for the future as a tour guide at Biggin Hill.



Creativity was high on the agenda for our third annual Sunningdale Court and Perryfield House gardens competition and we were delighted that Kate and Nick from Crawley Borough Council joined us once again as judges.

The brief was to see how creative the residents could be with a small area, whether it be pots, a balcony or a small space to the front or rear of their home.

It was a really difficult challenge for Kate and Nick to pick the best in all the various categories because the standard was so high, but everyone agreed that the final winners were very well deserving.

Creative Crawley!

Mrs Siboniswe Banana won the award for the most variable and diverse garden – a veritable feast of brightly coloured fruit and vegetables, from pumpkins to strawberries. Mrs Nancy Chatsfield won the best kept garden award which included a display of fascinating garden ornaments. Mrs Vera Green won the most colourful garden award with her garden featuring a cascade of petunias (she confided that draught Guinness was the secret of her success!) And last but definitely not least, Mrs Inga Kirk won the best trough and baskets for her amazing display of colours.

A big thank you to everyone who entered and worked so hard to create such a wonderful display and ensure a really enjoyable day for everyone involved.



ARE YOUR HOME CONTENTS PROTECTED THIS WINTER?

Available to all tenants is a **Home Contents Insurance scheme** that gives you the chance to insure the contents of your home in an easy and affordable way. There are many benefits and it's so easy to apply.

Ask your local housing officer for a free information pack or call My Home Insurance on 0345 450 7288.

Terms and conditions, limits and exclusions apply. A copy of the policy wording is available on request.

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Benefit cap lowdown

You may have heard about the recent reduction in the benefit cap, but what is benefit cap and how has it changed?

There is a limit on the total amount of benefit, including Housing Benefit that most people aged 16 to 64 can get. In other words, you can't receive more than a certain amount of benefits.

This is called the benefit cap and on 7 November the total amount allowed was reduced. We've drawn a handy graphic to show the new benefit cap levels for different groups of people.

NB You're not affected by the cap if

you or your partner work, and either of the following apply: you or your partner are eligible for Working Tax Credit; you or your partner get Universal Credit, and your household income is more than £430 a month after tax and National Insurance.

The amounts shown are weekly amounts.



Happy birthday Foxley Hall!

This year sees the 40th anniversary of the opening of Foxley Hall in Purley. And one couple has been there since the beginning.

In 1976 David and Ann Letley were a newly married couple with a young son. They had been living in Brixton with David's mother for a while, but when she had to go into sheltered accommodation it was time to find a home of their own. Foxley Hall had only just been built and the Letleys were only the third family to move in so it was all very new and, David remembers, seemed very posh at the time.

"It was the first time we'd had a bathroom" remembers David. "In those days many homes didn't have an inside bathroom, so it was a real luxury for us. The area was very different from Brixton too, with lots of trees and big houses around." The couple settled into their home very happily and still love the fact that it's just five minutes

from the shops, and five minutes to the countryside too. As David says: "we can go out the back of the house and walk through countryside right through to Kenley Aerodrome, and we often see foxes and deer nearby."



At first the homes were owned and run by Utopia Housing Association and David points out that there were some problems in those days, including a very cold and wet Christmas when the roof was being repaired and the homes were left over the Christmas holiday with only tarpaulin for protection. The rain

poured into the homes, but thankfully David is very practical and he helped shore things up and keep the worst of the rain out until new contractors were appointed to finish the job.

David Letley's practicality and willingness to help out is enormously valued and appreciated by all of us at Keniston. He takes on many useful jobs at Foxley Hall, changing lightbulbs, clearing snow, reporting repairs and so on, completely voluntarily. He also works closely with Paul the gardener regarding improvements to the environment such as extra planting, and making sure that cleaning meets our standards. David saves residents a lot of money by us not having to call out contractors for these tasks and we really are very grateful to him.

Thank you David and we look forward to seeing you both at the 50th anniversary!

Comings and goings

We are all sad to say goodbye to Matthew Jackson who joined us in 2008 as a caretaker at Hornsey Road and Tollington Park. In recent years Matthew had carried out gardening duties at Silver Court and Byers Court so there will be many residents who know Matthew and will miss him, but we all wish him well for the future.

And we know also that everyone will join us in offering the warmest wishes to Property Services Administrator Laura Creed who has just gone on maternity leave. Ellen Evans will be joining us in the role while Laura is away, and we're delighted to welcome Ellen to the team.

Meet our new chief executive!

Several residents have already met Jonathan Card, Keniston's new chief executive, on his first walkabouts around the estates. Jonathan has really enjoyed meeting residents and hearing their views – it's such an important and valuable part of the job.

If you live in Hayles Street or Elliotts Row, you'll get a chance to meet and talk to him on the next walkabout which is on 14th December at 10.30am.

Christmas opening hours

The Keniston offices will be open for most of the Christmas and New Year period, apart from the Bank Holidays. We close at 5pm on Friday 23rd December and open again on Wednesday 28th. We are also closed on January 2nd for the New Year Bank holiday.

Have a wonderful Christmas everyone and a very happy New Year!

Bringing people together

When the residents of Sunningdale Court and Perryfield House in Crawley need a helping hand or a friendly ear, they know they can turn to someone who always has their best interests at heart – sheltered housing scheme manager Shona Griffin.



Shona with resident Claudia Moore

Shona really goes the extra mile for the residents, many of whom are very elderly and some of whom only speak a little English.

She organises coffee mornings, reports repairs, helps make GP appointments and arranges transport, ensures everyone is safe and well and generally keeps everyone as happy and contented as possible.

"Some of our residents don't have English as their first language and might not have family living nearby. They can get very isolated in that situation, so I try to help them as much as possible and gradually encourage them to get involved in the various activities we have going on" she says.

Shona starts every day with a call round to make sure there were no problems overnight. All the residents have emergency cords which alert out of hours service if anything happens while she's off duty; but many of the residents also like to have a call from her in the morning to touch base and make sure everything's OK. And throughout the day residents will often pop in for a cup of tea and a chat. Socialising is extremely important to many of

the older residents, who can get lonely without work or family to keep them active. The knitting and crochet group is very popular, as are games mornings which include domino sessions – much loved by the men. And there are lots of enjoyable social events for the residents to get involved in.

"One of our ladies was a cook for 60 years. She's 94 now and can't get out and about like she used to, but she makes wonderful cakes and bread puddings to share at parties or for us to sell when we're fundraising. She even makes cream slices with home-made rough puff pastry!"

Shona is also the person responsible for the very popular gardening competition which is held every year. She set it up with the help of Crawley Council who provide the judges, one of whom is the manager at nearby Tilgate Park. He not only judges the various categories, but gives the gardeners tips and useful feedback. Check out the wonderful gardens which won awards this year!



We're on Twitter too!

As well as our Facebook page, we have a Facebook chat group called Keniston Gossip and we're active on Twitter too. Come and join in the conversation!



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