



HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN OPENS LARGE VETERANS HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH LONDON

EMBARGOED UNTIL: Friday 11 October 2019 at 12.00 noon

Her Majesty The Queen today opened one of the UK's biggest Veterans housing projects in recent years consisting of 68 homes at Haig Housing's headquarters estate in Morden - London's largest community of ex-Service personnel - which will provide much needed accommodation for ex-military personnel and their families.

Haig Housing, one of the country's oldest military charities, has been the UK's main provider of homes for Veterans and their families for over 100 years.

The seven different blocks that make up the development are named after Her Majesty (the Trust's Patron), five military and SOE Victoria and George Cross gallantry recipients and a local Ward Councillor who was the London Borough of Merton's first Armed Forces Champion and stalwart supporter of the Trust and the local Reservist and Veteran community.

The blocks are Queen Elizabeth Terrace, Cyril Barton House (RAF), Albert Dugdale House (Army), Jack Cornwell House (RN), Kulbir Thapa House (Army), Odette Sansom House (SOE) and Maxi Martin House (former Merton councillor). The development also includes a memorial garden named after Sergeant Peter Walley RAF.

The development of one to four-bedroomed houses and flats has been built for the future and includes solar panelling and vehicle electric re-charging facilities. Situated in the south Morden Conservation area, it is close to good transport links, schools and green spaces. All houses are available at affordable rents with seven of the homes fully adapted for wheelchair use, complete with external mobility scooter storage.

Funding has been provided jointly from the Veterans Accommodation Fund, set up from the monies arising from the Government's LIBOR banking fines, and from Haig Housing itself. Veterans' charity Forces Support has also assisted generously with funding for the mobility adaptations and the memorial garden.

Haig Housing was one of the beneficiaries of the hugely successful Poppies at The Tower installation which raised millions for Veterans charities five years ago and is the country's leading Veterans housing charity.

Haig Housing Chief Executive, Brigadier James Richardson, said, "We are delighted to welcome our Patron, Her Majesty The Queen, to open this inspiring new development of homes for Veterans and their families. The development raises the bar and sets new standards fit for those who have served their country and, often, risked all."

ENDS

The Development:

Queen Elizabeth Terrace

Named after and with the permission of Her Majesty The Queen, Patron of Haig Housing.

John Cornwell House

On 31 May 1916 the British Grand Fleet clashed with the German High Fleet at Jutland in the North Sea. John Cornwell now a Boy, First Class, and not yet sixteen and a half years old, was the sight-setter on HMS Chester's front 5.5-inch gun turret, with the job of taking orders from fire control and applying the necessary range corrections to the gun. At 5.40 pm HMS Chester came under heavy fire from four German Light Cruisers and was hit seventeen times in a few minutes. 30 men were killed and 46 wounded, amongst the casualties, the entire crew of the forward 5.5-inch turret. After the shock of the battle only one figure, mortally wounded, remained standing by the turret. Captain Lawson, Commanding Officer of HMS Chester, in a letter to Cornwell's mother, and referring to her son's conduct wrote: "His devotion to duty was an example to all of us. The wounds which resulted in his death within a short time were received in the first few minutes of the action. He remained steadily at his most exposed post on the gun, waiting for orders. His gun would not bear on the enemy; all but two of the ten crew were killed or wounded, and he was the only one who was in such an exposed position. But he felt he might be needed and indeed he might have been; so he stayed there, standing and waiting, under heavy fire, with just his own brave heart, and God's help to support him".

Jack Cornwell survived and was landed by the badly damaged HMS Chester at Grimsby in whose hospital he died from his injuries on 2 June 1916. He was later posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross which his mother collected from King George V at Buckingham Palace in November 1916. His bravery and devotion to duty sparked the public's imagination and he became known as the "boy hero of Jutland".

Cyril Barton House

Cyril Joe Barton VC was born on 5 June 1921 at Elveden, Suffolk and died on 31 March 1944 (aged 22) at Ryhope, County Durham. He was buried at Bonner Hill Road Cemetery, Kingston-upon-Thames .

He was a Second World War bomber pilot in the Royal Air Force who received the Victoria Cross, the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth Armed Forces.

On the night of 30 March 1944, while flying in an attack on the city of Nuremberg, in Germany, during the Battle of Berlin air offensive, whilst 70 miles from the target, Barton's Halifax was badly shot-up in attacks by two Luftwaffe night-fighters, a Junkers Ju 88 and a Messerschmitt 210, resulting in two of his fuel tanks being punctured, both its radio and rear turret gun port being disabled, the starboard inner engine being critically damaged and the internal intercom lines being cut. In a running battle, despite the attacks being persistent and determined, Barton as captain of the aircraft succeeded by good flying in throwing off and escaping his faster and more agile assailants. However, a misunderstanding in on-board communications in the aircraft at the height of the crisis resulted in three of the 7-man crew bailing out, leaving Barton with no navigator, bombardier or wireless operator. Rather than turn back for England, he decided to press on with the mission, against the odds of further attacks in a semi-wrecked aircraft that was leaking fuel and handicapped by lack of a full crew. Arriving over the target, he released the bomb payload himself and then, as Barton turned the aircraft for home, its ailing starboard engine blew-up. Subsequently he nursed the damaged airframe over a four-and-a-half hour flight with no navigational assistance back across the hostile defences of Germany and occupied Europe, and across the North Sea. As LK797 crossed the English coast at dawn 90 miles to the north of its base its fuel ran out because of the battle damage leakage and, with only one engine still running and at too low a height to allow a remaining crew bail-out by parachute, Barton crash-landed the bomber at the village of Ryhope, steering away in the final descent from the houses and coal pit-head workings. Barton was pulled from the wrecked aircraft alive but died of injuries sustained in the landing before he reached the hospital. The three remaining on-board members of the crew survived the forced landing.

Maxi Martin Court

A long-standing member of the Labour Party, Maxi served as a Councillor for St Helier Ward (in which Haig's Morden estate lies) for 18 years. In 2003/04 she was Mayor of Merton and in 2010 she was appointed Cabinet member for children's services, having served as Cabinet member for social services and education in previous administrations.

Councillor Martin was dedicated to serving her Ward residents and to giving a voice to the young and more vulnerable in Merton. She was a passionate advocate of children and young people, always very popular with children across the borough when she frequently visited them at their schools, taking a huge interest in their learning and creating a borough of opportunity for them. Her most recent school visit was not long before she fell ill, when she went to Abbotsbury Primary School to see all the donations the children had collected from residents to support refugees living in the borough.

She was also a regular visitor to Haig Housing whose headquarters estate lay within her Ward, as well as being the Borough's Armed Forces Champion.

Sadly, Councillor Martin died peacefully in her sleep during the evening of 6 April 2016. She had been ill since the previous December.

Leader of Merton Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, said: "Maxi was a wonderful Councillor and was deeply committed to representing residents in St Helier. She was also devoted to the interests of young people and worked tirelessly to ensure their voices were

heard. The Armed Forces also valued the work she did in organising the yearly Armed Forces Day Parade in Merton”.

Odette Sansom House

Odette Sansom Hallows GC, MBE was born on 28 April 1912 and died on 13 March 1995. Also known as Odette Sansom and Odette Churchill, she was an Allied intelligence officer during the Second World War.

Her wartime exploits and endurance of a brutal interrogation and imprisonment, which were chronicled in books and a motion picture, made her one of the most celebrated members of the Special Operations Executive, the British sabotage and espionage organisation, and one of the few to survive Nazi imprisonment.

She was the first woman to be awarded both the George Cross, and to be appointed a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur.

At Fresnes Prison, Sansom was interrogated by the Gestapo fourteen times. She was subjected to torture. Her back was scorched with a red-hot poker and all of her toenails were pulled out. She was condemned to death on two counts in June 1943, to which she responded, "Then you will have to make up your mind on what count I am to be executed, because I can only die once." She was sent her to Ravensbrück concentration camp.

After the Allied landings in the south of France in August 1944, on orders from Berlin, all food was withdrawn for a week, all light was removed from Sansom's cell, and the heat was turned up. Despite a report by the camp doctor that she would not survive such conditions for more than a few weeks, after being found unconscious in her cell she was placed in solitary confinement. Her conditions only improved in December 1944, when she was moved to a ground floor cell. The cell was located near the crematorium and would be covered with burned hair from the cremations. At one point toward the end of the war, she witnessed an instance of cannibalism of a dead inmate by starving prisoners.

When the Allies were only a few miles from Ravensbrück, the camp commandant Fritz Suhren took Sansom and drove to an American base to surrender. He hoped that her supposed connections to Churchill might allow him to negotiate his way out of execution but she immediately told the Americans to arrest him.

Kulbir Thapa House

Kulbir Thapa Magar VC was born on 15 December 1888 and died on 3 October 1956 in Nepal. He was the first Nepalese Gurkha recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.

Thapa was a 26-year-old Rifleman in the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles, British Indian Army, during the First World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. On 25 September 1915 in Fauquissart, France Rifleman Kulbir Thapa, having been wounded himself, found a

wounded soldier of The Leicestershire Regiment behind the first-line German trench (believed to be a 20-year-old soldier from Melton Mowbray by the name of Bill Keightley). Although urged to save himself, the Gurkha stayed with the wounded man all day and night. Early next day, in misty weather, he dragged him through the German wire, within spitting distance from the Germans, and, leaving him in a place of comparative safety, returned and brought in two wounded Gurkhas, one after the other. He then went back, and, in broad daylight, fetched the British soldier, carrying him most of the way under enemy fire.

Such an incredible act of faith and courage had by now attracted a good deal of attention, and when he emerged from his trench for the third time with one more wounded comrade over his shoulder, the German soldiers actually clapped their hands to encourage the Gurkha on. Only this time, the Gurkha walked right across the No-Mans-Land back to his own side.

The Victoria Cross awarded to Kulbir Thapa was in the first group of awards for the Battle of Loos which were gazetted on 18 November 1915. Of the 18 VC's gazetted that day no less than 17, including Thapa's, were presented by the King at Buckingham Palace in nine presentations between December 1915 and January 1917.

He later achieved the rank of Havildar (equivalent to Sergeant).

Albert Dugdale House

On 2nd April 1916 there was an explosion in a store at the Faversham Powder Mills, Kent. The store contained 200 tons of TNT and the factory site some 500 tons altogether. All the buildings were destroyed and a chain of explosions followed. Fires spread rapidly and the dead and injured lay all around. Together with others, Bombardier Bert Dugdale assisted in the rescue of the wounded, showing great courage, devotion to duty and disregard for their own safety. Not only did they prevent further explosions, but by their example others became helpers when previously reluctant to help. All of those who assisted were awarded the Edward Medal.

Bombardier Bert Dugdale was awarded the Edward Medal, alongside those others who he assisted. Many years later the Edward Medal was replaced by the George Cross although by this time he had died.

The 1916 explosion at Faversham was the worst in the history of the British explosives industry. Considering the quantity of explosive chemicals stored at the works — with one report indicating that a further 3,000 tons remained in nearby sheds unaffected — it is remarkable, and a tribute to those who struggled against the fire, that so much of the nation's munitions were prevented from contributing further to the catastrophe. As it was a Sunday, no women were at work but 115 men and boys were killed, including all the Works Fire Brigade, in the initial and subsequent explosions. The bodies of seven victims were never found while the other 108 were buried in a mass grave at Faversham Cemetery.

The munitions factory was in a remote spot in the middle of the open marshes of North Kent, next to the Thames coastline and the explosion was heard across the Thames estuary and as far away as Norwich and Great Yarmouth.

Notes to Editors

1. For all press enquiries, to arrange any interviews with the Haig Housing Trust's Chief Executive James Richardson MBE or for images contact:

Kellie King, Events & Communications Co-ordinator
Tel: 020 8685 5786 Ext 204 Mob: 07703 670639
Email: kellie.king@haighousing.org.uk

2. Website: www.haighousing.org.uk

3. Facebook: Haig Housing; Coming Home; Twitter: [@cominghomeorg](https://twitter.com/cominghomeorg)

Haig Housing Trust - "Housing the ex-Service Community."

Haig Housing is a charitable housing Trust and the leading provider of rental housing for ex-Service people and their families in the United Kingdom.

Across the UK, Haig has over 1,500 properties - mostly built in the 1930's, 50's and 90's. Homes are situated on small, well managed estates of usually around 30 properties but they can range from about 6 houses up to the largest estate in Morden of over 345 homes. Properties are a mix of family-sized houses, maisonettes and smaller flats, which are spread throughout the UK in over 50 different local authorities. Properties are available to qualifying beneficiaries at a charitable rent, roughly comparable to that charged by the local authority.

Haig also offers special housing solutions for severely wounded and disabled Service and ex-Service personnel nationwide. Homes are found and acquired in areas conducive to the needs and personal preferences of the individual, adapted to meet these needs and a shared ownership/rental scheme then agreed. Of the 57 homes obtained in this way since the scheme was first established by Haig under the 'Coming Home' fundraising brand some 9 years ago, 19 have now been fully bought out. In this way the Trust is able to continue providing appropriate housing for those personnel and other Veterans in need of rebuilding their lives following traumatic life changing injuries.

The homes on the new development opened today by Her Majesty have been funded with help of a grant from the Ministry of Defence Veterans' Accommodation Fund, provided by the fines levied on banks following the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) rate-rigging scandal. This grant achieved 40% of the overall cost and enabled Haig to make a cost effective plan for development.

The Trust had previously welcomed the Chief of Defence People, Lieutenant General Richard Nugee CVO CBE, to Morden in December 2017 to open a new transitional housing scheme of 8 one-bedroomed homes aimed at single beneficiaries or couples.

Largely paid for from the same Fund, these homes have different eligibility criteria to the Trust's general needs housing and are aimed primarily at Service leavers and other Veterans returning to the workplace with offers of or plans for work in London but who would not otherwise be able to afford the high costs of London's commercial rental market. Available on renewable tenancies for up to 2 years, at 60% of the going commercial rate, these aim to provide a housing 'stepping stone' until such time as the beneficiary is established in their new career and can more readily afford to move on to other accommodation.

The Trust organised last year "The Long Walk Home", a 100 mile pilgrimage walk of Veterans, serving personnel and reservists, from the Menem Gate in Ypres to the Cenotaph in Whitehall to recognise the Centenary of the ending of the Great War. The Walk culminated with the Nation's annual Service of Remembrance on Armistice Day, Sunday 11th November.

The Trust was also one of the Service charities involved with the Tower of London ceramic poppy installation, "Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red" at the Tower of London that marked one hundred years since the first full day of Britain's involvement in the First World War. Created by artists Paul Cummins and Tom Piper, 888,246 ceramic poppies were used in the installation. The Trust was subsequently one of those to benefit enormously from their sale.