



Birtley
House

house&home

Edition 2, 2020



A little perspective...
Celebrating 75 years on the Birtley Estate
Activities memories
Raising our digital profile



Gratitude

Amidst the trials and tribulations that the Care industry has experienced this year, not least thanks to the rather mixed messages and muddled guidance coming from our government, what has been obvious is that there is now a much better understanding by the general population of the hard work and dedication given by the UK's care home staff. Unless someone has a relative or loved one in a nursing home, it can be hard to appreciate just what the staff working in the nation's care homes have actually to do, but the amount of media coverage highlighting the work 'at the coal face' has showcased their incredible work and helped raise the profile of the real situation of care homes like never before.

At Birtley House we are, perhaps, more fortunate than some other care homes in that we have a long-standing good reputation and a clientele that, predominantly, do not require social services funding, but our staff's daily duties remain the same as all other care homes (although we try to provide a level of care, compassion and quality of life that stands comparison to the very best!). With this new understanding has come a level of gratitude from the public towards care workers in both nursing homes and the NHS which is wonderful to see. Perhaps one good thing that might come out of this pandemic is that we might now be a kinder population, and more willing to show thanks where it is due.

I can certainly add my own gratitude to our wonderful staff at Birtley House for enduring all the stresses, 'new normals' and difficulties of keeping our residents so well looked after during the past six months. I've always believed that what sets Birtley House apart is not the lovely old

house or beautiful setting, but instead, at its heart and soul are the superb, caring staff we have here. We hope that by introducing our recent new 'core values' of Kindness, Integrity, Positivity, and Adaptability, these high standards will be further established amongst our staff.

In the meantime, we will continue to work hard to keep our residents safe and happy, no matter what the coming winter months might have in store for us all. Thank you to all our residents and families who have written such kind words either directly to us or on carehome.co.uk, they have meant so much to us, and we look forward to receiving more of these.



Frank Whalley, Director

The 'New Normal?'

When I submitted my last piece of copy for the current edition of 'House and Home' in the Spring, I think it is safe to say that none of us, not least our own government, could have quite predicted the state the world would be in just a few months later. As we have all battled our way through this pandemic, we are a little battered and bruised but also immensely gratified by the loyalty, hard work and sheer dogged determination of the entire Birtley House team in our concerted efforts to get us through this most challenging of times. I often reflect on those early days of this crisis when we started slowly to come to terms with the magnitude of the situation we faced. It really is a testament to the resilience of our residents and staff with the unconditional support from our families that we reach this point still smiling!

My relatively new role as Resident Liaison Director has taken a good few twists and turns. Indeed I was thinking I might need to rename myself as Resident AND Family Liaison. Due to the cruel nature of what we have faced over the last months we haven't been able to welcome as many new residents as we had hoped at the beginning of the year but I am confident this tide will turn very

soon. What has become very clear is that the lines of communication, whether they be virtual or actual, have been the key in this crisis. It was wonderful to have been able to welcome families back to visit as of 8th June, albeit in a more restrictive manner. Believe me when I say it feels very 'un-Birtley' not to go back to our open-door policy with our legendary hospitality. For your continued support in this 'new normal' we continue to be grateful.

Despite the ups and downs it is fair to say that it hasn't been all doom and gloom. The lovely weather, certainly to begin with, has been very welcome. Residents have been able to spend more time outdoors enjoying the sights and sounds of nature when the roads haven't been so busy and the skies have been quieter too. We have all become expert in Zoom and Skype calls! Keeping connected; staying active in both mind and body; maintaining the Birtley way of life, as best we can, has been a real boon throughout this time.

The 'new normal' may not resemble the old one but we continue to adapt and move forward.

**Sinéad Whalley,
Resident Liaison Director**

We have all become expert in Zoom and Skype calls! Keeping connected; staying active in both mind and body; maintaining the Birtley way of life, as best we can



Recent CQC report on Birtley House



"You have also worked collaboratively with other stakeholders and partners to review, improve and shape the future of care."
– Quote CQC

Earlier this year in June, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessed our new operations with regards to the changes we had implemented to manage potential COVID-19 outbreaks within the home. This was outside of their usual practice and not what would count as a regular inspection. Our previous rating of 'Good' from our last official inspection remains in place. We were delighted to hear that they felt we were performing to a good standard with regards to the risk of Coronavirus, and that there was nothing else we could have put in place to be more safe or operationally efficient.

They were guided by criteria which covers; safe care and treatment, staffing arrangements, protection from abuse, assurance processes, monitoring and risk management, to discover how our service was coping.

Overall, the CQC report explains that they were satisfied that we have thoroughly demonstrated that we have not allowed the pandemic to affect the quality of the care we provide. We have various contingency plans in place, which are effective enough to manage potential outbreaks or mass staff sickness. Staff have received training on various areas including proper use of PPE and

managing equipment and resources by reducing the need to move equipment and other items across the house. We demonstrated that our leadership has been strong with good management of any agency staff used by only accepting block bookings. We could also demonstrate that we have optimised the use of technology and found creative ways to keep Residents connected with their loved ones, as well as providing support to family members through regular communication. CQC recognised that we have implemented new innovations, and that this time has allowed us to reflect how we wish to move forward in the future. This helped to shape our four core values which were launched to the staff last month – Kindness, Integrity, Positivity, Adaptability. The full write up from the report can be found in the blog pages on our website. We hope it helps to demonstrate that we are continuing to deliver quality care in a safe environment. Confidence in care homes is more important now than it ever has been.

[www.birtleyhouse.co.uk
/blog/cqc-review-of-birtley-throughout-the-covid-19-pandemic/](http://www.birtleyhouse.co.uk/blog/cqc-review-of-birtley-throughout-the-covid-19-pandemic/)

An Official Introduction

Please allow a warm ‘Hello’ from me, as it is the first time I am writing in the newsletter. My name is Ilias -it is pronounced as “ill-ee-yAAs”, and I am from Athens, Greece. I came to the UK in 2016 and joined the NHS as a Registered Nurse in the Coronary Care Unit. Soon after I completed my specialisation in Advance Life Support (Resuscitation Council, UK) and got promoted to Resuscitation Officer of the Trust I was working for. As part of my role I was attending all emergencies that would happen in the hospital, aiming to be next to the patients in need in less than 2 minutes, trying to treat life-threatening deterioration and/or cardiac arrests.

Although the fast pace and acuteness of the role I had was something that I really enjoyed, I wanted to find a way to further impact the lives of the people I look after, so I decided to join social care.

Having some, but not significant, healthcare management experience, led me to go back to University and study for a Master’s in Business Administration (MBA), which I am still in the process of completing.

That was when I met my partner, Zoe (means ‘life’ in Greek), and decided to relocate from London to Surrey. Soon after that, I found



Ilias photographed here just before his recent interview with Channel 5 news

the support I was looking for in order to start my healthcare management journey, under the Birtley House ‘wings’.

On reflection, there wouldn’t be a better time joining social care, as the challenges soon after I was appointed as Deputy Manager of the service, have increased greatly and every skill and knowledge I had has been put to test several times over.

I think what has made things easier and more bearable during these difficult times is the teamwork and positive culture that we are striving for here in the

Birtley family, accompanied with the fact that staff and management have gone above and beyond their roles and job descriptions and exceeded every expectation.

In case you need to put a face to a name here is a photo of me, proudly accompanying Simon Whalley on a recent interview regarding the Covid-19 testing process with Channel 5 news.

**Ilias Rentoulis,
Deputy Manager**

A little perspective...

I think we can all agree that as we look at our lives this year, they don't quite feel like our own anymore. We've all built up so much around us which we've come to take for granted over our years, and this year we've had to adapt and change so much of what we know, love and enjoy, learning our 'new normal' very quickly.

The daily COVID-19 status dictates how we live, how we spend our free time, who we meet up with, where we go and what we do. Our hobbies and freedom have been taken away and our normal life is now restricted and demanding in order to remain safe.

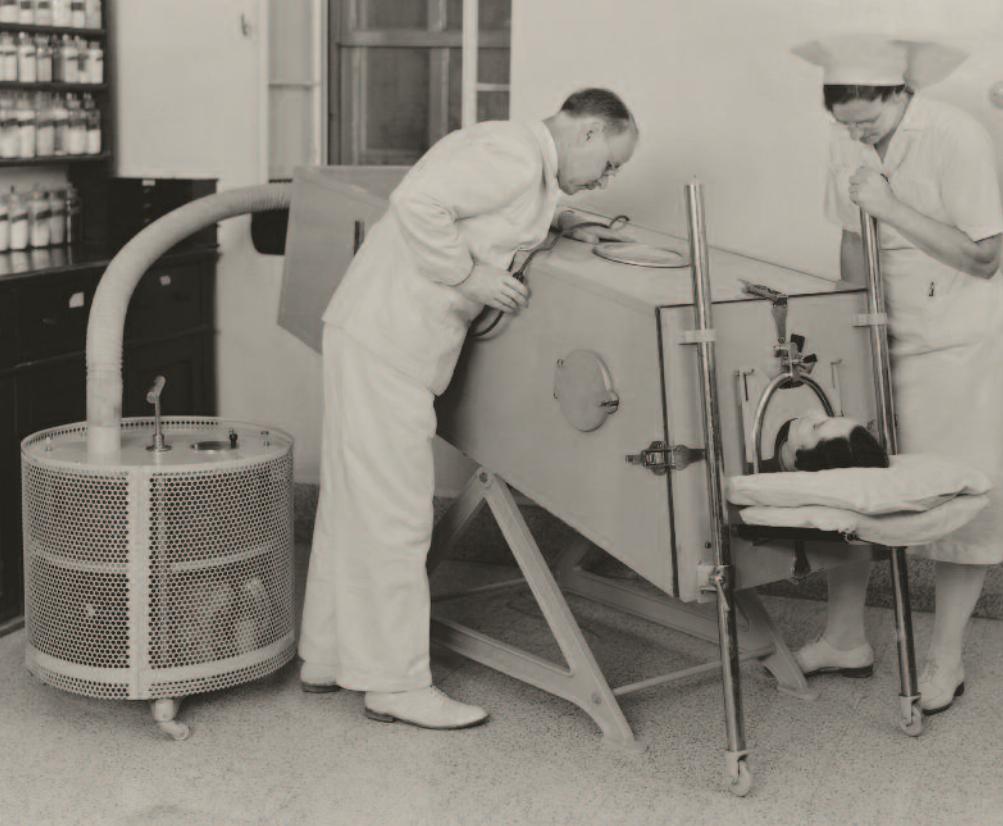
Whilst it continues to loom around us, it has also brought us a fresh perspective on what is truly important to us, and for those who work outside of the care industry, it has allowed many of us to slow down, and appreciate a down time which although we have been forced to take, it has been quite welcomed by many. Some people's houses have never looked better, they've done up their gardens, painted the fences, read the books they've always intended and re-evaluated what they want in life. In some cases, it has given people the

strength to walk away from situations that are no longer serving them, which is of course good for the soul. For those of us working in the care industry, we have not stopped, and we are emotionally torn between protecting our own families and continuing to care for those who need our support daily, no matter what the circumstance. It is a battle of the heart, and I am proud that so many of the Birtley team have been able to soldier on, putting their own fears aside during this time, and continuing to show up to work each day, whilst behaving safely outside of Birtley House as well as when here on shift.

In this ever-evolving situation, it is very important that people support each other. We must also show that we are understanding when staff members feel confused, anxious and fearful of what the next day will bring. Over the past 6 months we have tried to demonstrate knowledge, cooperation, understanding, skills, commitment, empathy, care, and dedication to those who we love and care for, our Residents. I have had faith along the way that we are achieving this, and I am assured when I see Residents and their families smiling to us, sending us heart-warming letters, cards and expressions of gratitude and their

faith in our ability to provide safe and effective care for their loved ones. This fills me up along the way and helps me and the team to know we are doing things right. I was even more proud of the team when we were able to prove to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) that we were operating safely based on changes we had implemented, and that we could not at the time put anything else in place to be more effective.

Everything we have achieved is down to an empathetic and caring attitude which so many of our great people bring to the table each day. This is also shown from our supportive Residents, family members and stakeholders in Birtley. Without your understanding and support in recent months, this would have been a lot harder. We will continue to evolve as advised by any new government guidelines or legislation, circumstances or other. And we will work to protect what we have put in place to prevent COVID-19 and continue to provide a safe home and working environment for our Residents and staff.



An Iron Lung, a device that enables breathing when person loses their muscle control.

Changing the subject now, I wanted to tell you a story for a little perspective. This is the story of Martha Mason who lived in 'isolation' for over 60 years.

Born in 1937 in a small town in North Carolina, Martha Mason was unfortunate to contract Polio at the age of 11. The disease which attacks the lungs and, in some cases, paralyzes them, had already taken the life of her brother and doctors had given her an estimated year to live with the aid of an Iron Lung. Without its support breathing can feel like lifting weights, and Martha spent 61 years of her life immobilized in the machine for the majority of her days and nights. Martha refused to let it ruin or define her life and she finished school at the top of her class, graduated from college and went on to become a writer in local newspaper. She created a radiant world for herself wherever possible, whilst many might have shied away from any focus, she held dinner parties with a table pushed next to her Iron Lung, making sure she lived to her full potential. When voice recorder computers became available in mid-90s, they helped her to write a book called 'Breathe'.

Martha said in 2003:

"I am happy with who I am, where I am. I would not have chosen this life, certainly. But given this life, I've probably had the best situation anyone could ask for".

Defying all the odds, Martha eventually died in 2009 at the age of 72 years old. Over 60 years in the Iron Lung is certainly a form of life sentence that most of us could not begin to imagine. Yet, throughout her life Martha chose to live well wherever she could and over the years has inspired many others to do the same.

Every time I start to feel that COVID -19 has taken so much away from me I think about this lady, how much resilience she has had and determination to live her life so meaningfully, regardless of the limitations she faced.

Martha's story is unique and rare but there are still many others in our world who suddenly have to adapt to life altering scenarios which were never expected, especially when they had started their lives in the same way so

many of us do. These people remind us that as people we are resilient and strong despite what falls in our paths, and that we will come through this stronger by adopting a more positive perspective.

My wish is that you find the positive in each day, whilst not losing faith that more enjoyable days are coming, and in the meantime, whilst we continue to live in a Pandemic, restricted or not, we have lives to live to the fullest wherever possible and lots to remain grateful for.

As I finish writing here, I am about to take a step outside in our beautiful grounds, and allow myself to relax for a moment, taking in the sights, sounds and smells of the nature that is around me and the beauty it represents. It is a lovely day weather wise here at Birtley, and I'm sure I will see one or two of our Residents along the way, likely off to do the same thing.

All the best
**Sylvia Indycka,
Registered Manager**



Celebrating 75 years of providing Care at Birtley House

Eyhurst Court Ltd, which remains the official name of our business was first registered in 1932 but moved to Birtley House in August 1945 - hence our 75th celebration - and has operated as Birtley House Nursing Home ever since. It was founded by Dr Lloyd Driver - my grandfather - an army surgeon in the First World War and previously one of the early pioneers of X-ray technology, Dr Driver's war experience lead him and his wife Winifred to take those with mental illness into care in their own home, first located in Kingswood and then, during the War, at Loxwood.

The focus at Birtley evolved to nursing care, mainly for the elderly, but it has remained very much family run with Dr Driver's daughter, (my mother) June and my father Dick building the business from the 1950s.

Originally we lived on the ground floor here (which is why we have apartment's named after June and Dr Driver). Today the Whalley family all take an active role in managing the business and ensuring that the experience of care given here at Birtley House, is as though you were part of the family. Caroline, Frank, Tim, and Sinéad, have made such a difference in helping build the family atmosphere and created a very special home for all those who move to Birtley with the

highest quality of life for everyone in support of their care needs.

As a family we have always felt that the whole team here are like an extended family and we cannot thank everyone enough for all the amazing work you do. Sylvia's very personal involvement has made her very much like another member of the family but with so many people who have worked with us for so many years it is not possible to thank everyone individually - but you are all close to our hearts. Birtley has always been my family home – and I hope you all feel it is yours too.

**Simon Whalley,
Chairman & Director**

At the end of August we celebrated the 75th occasion with a wonderful afternoon tea, albeit socially distanced. We had intended doing it out on the front lawn, with entertainment from a local song and dance company,



but unfortunately on the day the weather wasn't up to it. Thankfully our Orangery and main lounge area are big enough to be transformed into a spacious enough dining room, to safely accommodate all of our Residents who wanted to attend.

Simon had written up a little about the history of the business and he addressed everyone to talk about it for a few moments, explaining the many reasons behind the celebration. He also read out a speech which had been written by David Holmes, Chair of the Surrey Care Association. David had planned to attend and read it himself, but with the celebration moving indoors and restrictions in place this was not possible.





Here's what David had to say...

People often ask me what outstanding Social care looks like.

I always answer in terms of the outcomes it enables people to achieve – the positive impact that care and support has on people's lives. In different settings this will vary. In a learning disability service, like those that I run, it might be supporting someone to get their first job, or find a girlfriend. In a mental health service it might be keeping someone clean from drugs. In a physical disability service it might be helping someone drive a car, or access the community like everybody else.

In older peoples' services it is about supporting people's wellbeing. It is about enabling people to live interesting and meaningful lives of real purpose – lives where people look forward to getting up in the morning – where people feel safe and happy – where people are surrounded by people who genuinely care for them. This is what Birtley House does in spades.

When people ask me what goes into building a care service which supports people to live rich and purposeful lives, my answer here is that outstanding services have (at least) three key characteristics.

Firstly, outstanding services have excellent staff. Your staff are the people

who are delivering care and support minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. In every moment of care they enrich the lives of the person being cared for. They are people of great integrity, with strong person values. They want to do their job as well as they possibly can. They want to learn and develop. They always go the extra mile. They go beyond the call of duty. I am, of course, describing the Birtley House staff team! Secondly, outstanding services deliver services in beautiful locations. Our environment is important because it affects our wellbeing. We do know that it is hard to be happy if you are in a place which you don't like.

My acid test for a care home is whether I would want to live there. It will be no surprise to you that I think I could be happy living at Birtley!

Finally, I firmly believe that outstanding services have outstanding leaders. Here I am talking about people who own and manage care homes, and I am also talking about everyone else connected with the care home. Leadership comes in many forms, and in the best services everyone is taking responsibility, everyone is creative, everyone is trying to make good things happen, everyone is open to learning, outward looking, seeking out best practice and bringing it back.

Here, too, I am talking about Birtley

House. The richness of life here, whether sculptural exhibitions, or woodcraft fairs, or marking VE Day or simply celebrating a birthday, point to brilliant leadership throughout the service.

I would like to highlight just one more characteristic of outstanding services. It feels only right and proper, on the event of your 75th anniversary here, to highlight the importance of continuity. Great services are not built overnight – they take many years of nurturing. Think of the most beautiful garden you have ever visited. Kew, perhaps, or Stourhead, or Stowe? Now think about how long it took for that garden to become that beautiful. Year after year the gardener has tended those plants with love. Year after year he has tried something new. Each year the garden is better than the year before.

Care homes are the same. They benefit from the continuity which comes from having principled owners who have real skin in the game – people who have a long-term passion for delivering the best possible care. People who do their very best, year after year after year.

Make no mistake, the long-term leadership and ownership of the Whalley Family are a priceless asset to Birtley House. They must be cherished too!

I wish you all well today and extend my warmest congratulations on reaching this extraordinary milestone.

**David Holmes,
Chair, Surrey Care
Association & Chair of the
Ashcroft Group**

Activities

Who would have imagined or foreseen what was to be our way of ‘normal’ life. The whole country continues to go in and out of lockdown, as does the world, but whilst we have adapted here at Birtley House we haven’t let that stop us keeping our Residents and ourselves upbeat.



We have been very creative with arts and crafts and wherever possible and have continued with very small group activities (socially distanced of course). We've done more stone painting to add to our ever-growing collection in the courtyard, and we've potted up pretty flowers and plants in the previously hand painted pots. Throughout the summer this all made for a more pleasant area for our Residents to sit and enjoy the glorious weather we were so lucky to have had.

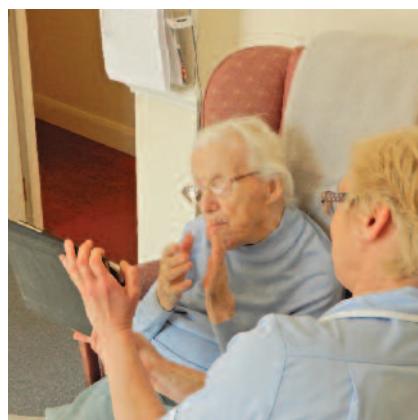


One-to-one times have been more important than ever during these difficult times. Having someone to talk to can make such a difference. Or a simple chat over a cup of tea, a quiz or crossword to keep our brains active. One-to-one armchair exercises to keep our limbs mobile are also popular and good for our physical and mental health. One afternoon my team and I took plain cut out paper petals to as many Residents as we could and got each one individually decorated. These were then all stuck together to create a gorgeous flower which continued to grow and grow as more petals were produced. The end result was beautiful and for a while it was enjoyed by many as it was seen proudly hanging on the front door of the house.



When it comes to exercising, we certainly couldn’t accept no option for physiotherapy. So, with a bit of modern technology and me on hand to supervise we were able to continue via Zoom! A first for me and a little getting used to for some our Residents who found it a little strange at first seeing Janet our usually in-house physiotherapist on the big screen. It worked really well and was a huge treat to see another familiar face as well as take part in a much-needed session.

Modern technology - where would we be without it? Zoom also connects us to our family members and friends. Zooming and facetime has become quite the norm here now. Great for so many and what a joy it brings to be able to see loved ones on the screen for a cup of tea and a chat.



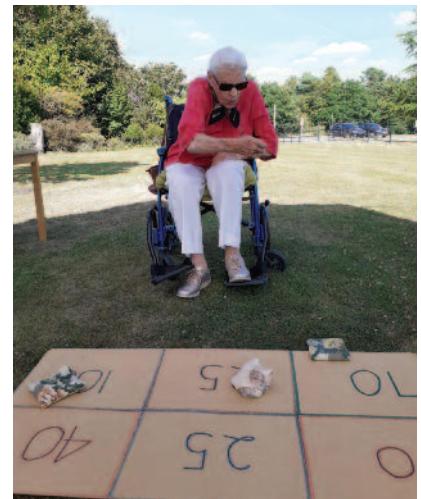


VE day celebrations were wonderful and we were blessed with glorious weather, which we enjoyed as a socially distanced group out on the front lawn. We were patriotic with our bunting and flags, we enjoyed music, singing, readings, a little reflection, and of course lots of cake with refreshing drinks.



Our annual Strawberry Tea afternoon wasn't overlooked either. Normally we would hold it out in the Rose Garden with a large gathering of Residents and families but no, that was another thing not happening this year. So instead we took the Strawberry Tea to them. Every resident was served a beautifully laid tea tray, complete with strawberries and cream, scones, a hand-picked rose and of course a refreshing glass of Pimms (where allowed of course) followed around with a tray of sandwiches. One of our residents sent down a little note to us, it meant so much and was very much appreciated after a long afternoon.

It read "Dear staff, thank you very much for going to such great a trouble to give me such a delicious tea. I am keeping the strawberries for supper so do not need any more food today. Love Rosamond."



We've been so fortunate to have good weather for most of this year so we've made the most of the outdoors wherever possible. Our Residents have also enjoyed a little healthy competition with some outdoor sports.



At the end of July we participated in the “Poems In A Pandemic” competition run by “Caretalk” – The voice of excellence in social care. Caretalk is distributed 10 times a year both digitally and in print. It’s written exclusively to promote and celebrate positive care, and is packed full of key industry opinions, articles, products and services which promote outcomes for staff and service users and add value to quality care provision.

A few of our staff and Residents took part in writing poems which were all submitted to the competition, and all were shortlisted in the finals! Here are a few examples...

Isolation

*Forget the pain of lonely days
Dysfunctional radiators
No visitors
Remember the kindness of busy staff
Watch Greylag geese fly off
Towards the lake and woods beyond
Listen to sparrows chirping
Watch white clouds slowly moving
And a pale blue sky appearing
Happiness can be found in the simple things
Music, tv, crosswords, reading
Lunch and activities with friends
But distance keeping
We are a lucky generation
Living in a world of hope and comfort
Covid 19 not with standing
Despite strong winds blowing
Sparrows are nesting
In nearby Wysteria and like them
With Birtley our host
I have come home to roost*

By Jennifer Barry

HOPE - Hang On Positively Everyone!

*Across the miles
I see the smiles -
Though continents apart
This lifts my heart
Gives hope of times to come*

*Special plans that are no more
Cause stress and tears for sure -
A weekly Zoom
Relieves the gloom
Gives hope of times to come*

*Each week, with even longer hair
Our family news we hear -
The distance seems to disappear
Whilst planning happier days to share
Gives hope of times to come*

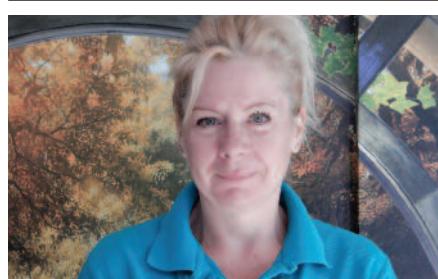
*We can but hope
That we will cope
With all life's ups and downs
By keeping smiles, ignoring frowns
Gives hope of times to come*

*I pray when 2020's past
Our good intentions really last -
Reflecting better lives to live
And kindness to our neighbours give
Sure hope of times to come.*

By Caroline Whalley



In other efforts our team and Residents wanted to do something special to commemorate the 75th anniversary, which was such a special occasion, everyone is so proud to be part of a business which has truly stood the test of time. So, they came together in secret to make a big '75' display, using the art of decoupage, which turned out beautifully and was presented to Simon and Caroline Whalley at the 75th celebratory afternoon.



There are many other things we have been up to, too many to list, and Sinéad's weekly letters have kept families well informed of what we have been up to along the way. So I will finish by re-introducing you to Charlotte Wilmshurst our new Wellbeing Companion. Charlotte, who goes by the name of Lottie, originally started working for Birtley as a Chef in 2007, until she moved on to a local school in 2013. She rejoined us at the beginning of August and has settled in so well. I know she will be a great asset to my team and to Birtley.

Tina Bell, Head of Activities



Activities Memories

I recently enjoyed looking through old Activities photo albums from the late 1990's. This method of recording and storing everyday events was very different nearly a quarter of a century ago, as these days photos are instantly available to see and share with family and friends all over the world at the touch of a button! (Remember taking the spool to the chemist for processing and then the fun of finally seeing the developed photos which might well have been in the camera for months?!)

As I reminisced over the many photos, it struck me just how 'active' the Activities at Birtley have always been! When I first started working here in 1997 Activities were just developing and becoming a requirement for Care Homes. Judy Bennet was the Activities Organiser for 3 afternoons a week, one of which was manicures. I joined her and together we planned a varied monthly programme, which took place in the Annexe sitting room. When I look back, I wonder how we managed with so little space. I remember holding slide shows there, icing fairy cakes, packing shoeboxes, singalongs and themed afternoons! In 1998 Judy retired and I recall her saying to me "it's over to you now Caroline, you'll be fine!" Help! was my initial reaction, but when Maureen Sullivan applied to the job advert, I knew everything

would be alright, which indeed it was, as we worked extremely happily together for almost 10 years before she and her husband moved to Norfolk.

Spanning over the past 20 years, I surprised myself that I could still remember virtually all the names of the many residents captured on camera for our Birtley archives, and perhaps it will surprise you to know that some of the members of staff (not counting the Whalley Family) are still working with us, (Ann Enticknap for one) whilst others have returned although in a different role (most recently, Charlotte Wilmshurst). On the whole, the Activities team has always been fortunate to have long-serving members of staff who have always worked well together to deliver a very varied, stimulating and fun programme of events, always bearing in mind the needs and interests of our residents at any particular time and adapting the programme as required.

To provide "meaningful activities that will enrich the lives of our residents" requires a great deal of thoughtful imagination and meticulous planning. However, it only needs one resident to say how much they have enjoyed a particular activity, to give you such a happy feeling! I can honestly say that in all the 22.5 years that I have been involved with Activities, I have



never found it at all boring - on the contrary, it has been a fascinating journey for me, learning about the interesting lives of so many of our wonderful Residents.

In May 2019 I handed over the reigns as Head of Activities to Tina Bell who had worked alongside me in the department for several years. It has been wonderful to see Tina enjoying this role as much as I did, and although I am still around to help out when necessary, she is leading her own little team through example, her "joie de vivre" and her sense of humour, which has been very obvious throughout lockdown when we really did have to think "out the box" each and every day! Relatives & Residents have always mentioned how special and different Birtley activities are, and I have no doubt that this high standard will continue with meaningful, imaginative and above all, fun activities. So please carry on with all you are doing, Tina, JoJo and Charlotte. Thank you and I am so proud of you all!

Caroline Whalley, Director

Our Birtley Heroes



Early on in the pandemic Sylwia, our Registered Manager and Tim Whalley, Director and Nominated Individual made the decision that we should go out of our way to recognise the heroes we have here at Birtley, and the work that they do. So, they issued everyone with a 'Birtley Heroes badge, a personal thank you card and invited them to join in a celebration of recognition for each and every team member, over a selection of tasty homemade cakes and refreshing beverages. This has become an ongoing celebration which takes place on the first Thursday of every month and each member of staff wears their new badge with pride.

Here are a few of the experiences of some of our new team members from 2020...

When lockdown happened in mid-March 2020, Corrine suddenly found herself stressed beyond belief as she was a self-employed cleaner with no work or pay. Her friend Maggie Howell (Marketing Manager for Surrey Hills Enterprises) mentioned that there was a temporary job advertised in Housekeeping at Birtley House, so without wasting any time, Corrine sent in her CV and received a phone call from Emma Abrew, had a successful interview and her DBS was processed promptly. By 15th April, Corrine was able to start working at Birtley as a temporary support worker for Housekeeping, Laundry, Kitchen washing up, whatever was required during this period of uncertainty.

Right from day one, Corrine proved herself to be an ideal person for this varied role, and we are all delighted that she is now a permanent member of staff. For Corrine, this permanency has enabled her to get a mortgage. She says that "without Birtley, I'm not quite sure how life would be for me, as Covid is still happening and jobs and life are odd to say the least! Everyone at Birtley is so friendly and helpful, the Residents are lovely. I absolutely love working here and have no intentions of ever leaving!"

Corrine has a wonderful personality and her smile makes everyone's day brighter! No job is too onerous for her and she does everything with a smile on her face. We have also discovered that she has various hidden talents which we have yet to utilise, and one of them is dancing!!





"Hello, my name is Simone, and I am from Cape Town, South Africa. I moved to the UK in 2018 and to Surrey to be closer to my family just as Covid -19 was slowly appearing on the news, at that point it was still confined to China. Just 3 weeks of looking for a job in the area I was blessed with a Care Assistant role at Birtley House Nursing Home. As I began at Birtley, the worldwide pandemic had taken hold, and I joined as we went into lockdown here. Of course, it was not what I had ever expected to experience when

working in care. It was an exceptionally difficult time for our Residents, as they were not able to see their loved ones for what felt like an eternity. I was just glad that I could be there to help provide some small comfort.

As I settled into my new working life in Birtley House I was overwhelmed by how the care team here worked so carefully, efficiently and proudly and how each and every one of us came together under such trying circumstances. I think for many the most difficult part initially was having to wear a mask for an entire 12-hour shift and only being able to take it off to be able to eat or drink. We are of course all now used to this.

For me, personally, I feel the Residents here are not just

Residents of Birtley House, they have become my family. I cherish seeing them every day, and of course I spend more time with them than I do my own family (even in unrestricted circumstances). They make me smile, they make me laugh, they even sometimes make me cry because each person has a story to tell. I thoroughly enjoy caring for them, even more so in this pandemic.

Here at Birtley House we are hard workers, we are a fantastic community, we appreciate our beautiful grounds, and we all know what we stand for. If our Birtley Heroes can get through a pandemic we can get through anything!"

Thank you

Simone, Care Assistant

In May, I started my new role as receptionist for Birtley House and due to the lockdown, I was located at the Barn. At that time only Frank was working in the Barn (all other office staff were working from home) and Sinead visited most days for a few hours. I was often working alone there.

It was all a little odd – a receptionist with no one to welcome! Answering the doorbell, via telephone, from a different location! Trying to learn names, without the help of faces! Being alone in a large office and hearing the printer whirr into action as someone sent a print job from home!

You may think that it was lonely, unenjoyable, uncomfortable NOT AT ALL. Every member of staff I spoke to was so friendly, welcoming me to the team and telling me that Birtley was a great place to work. They were also very patient with me when I wasn't sure who to speak to or I needed them to meet a delivery driver at the front door. It was an incredibly warm, socially distanced, welcome.

In June, reception was moved back into the main house and I got to be the 'new girl' all over again with another wonderful round of welcomes and now I could put names to faces too. It is not only the staff who made me feel part of the Birtley family but also the lovely residents and their families.

It was lovely being involved in the re-introduction of visitors to the house and seeing the joy it brought after so many weeks of lockdown. I look forward to when we can return to 'normal' and families can visit at any time, enjoy a cup of tea, and most importantly hug their loved ones. In the meantime, I will continue to take temperatures, give out masks and do my bit to keep everyone safe.

I really enjoy working at Birtley and I'm proud to be part of the team.

Lulu Ball, Receptionist



Lulu is pictured here trialling a new clear mask which is beneficial for those Residents who need to do some lip reading to be able to communicate well. So far, it has been well received.

Garden Write up Autumn 2020

2020. I don't think any of us could have predicted the unprecedented events that have occurred thus far, and it is safe to say our day to day lives have changed dramatically, hopefully in some ways for the better.

I'm going to start by doing what all good brits do and moan about the weather. The incredibly wet winter, followed by a dry hot spring with late frosts, a brief cooling in mid-summer and then the extreme prolonged heat in early August, add into the mix many windy days and you have a recipe for some challenging conditions to deal with. 2020 has not been my favourite year for this and the other obvious reason.



But these challenges are sent to test us and the mistakes I've made and the lessons I've learnt will be taken forward to next season. Gardening is ever evolving, in particular during these times of change in our weather patterns and its part of my job to adapt to the changing conditions.

It is very difficult to do any large scale watering in the formal gardens, especially the herbaceous borders, and with this in mind I'm attempting to change a few things around, moving away from plants that require a lot of TLC and instead planting tougher species that can tolerate the prolonged dry spells we're increasingly experiencing.

I've done some mass planting down the long walk (planting large blocks of perennials close to each other). This technique not only means the plants foliage provides a shelter for the soil meaning it won't dry out as quick, but it also has the added benefit that the plants help support each other as they grow, meaning less staking required and hopefully less weeding to do.

Over the Autumn and winter all the beds will get a generous thick layer of garden compost to help conserve the moisture in the soil. I'll also be moving some of the perennials in the mixed borders that suffer during drought conditions and replant them in

more favourable locations. The gaps will then be filled with more drought tolerant species.

It's strange to be talking about making these changes, which effectively mean moving away from the typical English Country Garden to a more Mediterranean style and hopefully these changes will be subtle enough (I've no plans to replace all the grass with gravel just yet) to not be noticed but as the climate conditions change it'll be necessary to make these changes to keep the gardens looking their very best.

Despite the challenging weather, once again the kitchen garden has produced some bountiful crops this year. A few early plantings succumbed to late frosts but all in all, despite the extreme heat, it's been a solid 8 out of 10 year. There's always room for improvement and all the beds will be heavily mulched with well-rotted organic manure and BIO-CHAR to help conserve the moisture and push that score back up come next season.

Due to the on-going events HALOW have only been able to provide limited help this year and therefore some projects I'd had in mind have had to be put on hold for now until they can return to their regular times.

Things never stand still here and as well as some of the points I've outlined earlier there are also some other potential improvements that'll be made. These include fixing the pond which has developed quite a serious leak somewhere in the upper pool, a new summer house and paved area to replace the old one, re-doing the herb garden to make it easier for the kitchen staff to access fresh herbs and extending the wildflower areas to help attract more and more wildlife.



I'm always looking at ways of improving the grounds to the benefit of residents, families and staff and if you have any ideas or you'd like to see things done differently then please let me know.

This will be a memorable year for many good but also many bad reasons but I hope everybody has taken some time to reflect on how lucky we are to work here and slowed down our over hectic lives just a bit to appreciate what we have.

Right, I'm off to tend to the pumpkins and veggies in the Kitchen Garden, no doubt I will be choosing one for my children to carve soon enough.

Best wishes
Matt Miller, Head Gardener



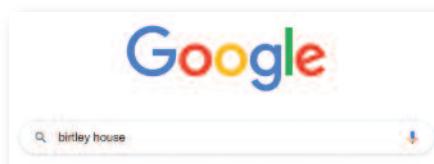
Raising our digital profile... With a little help from you!

As we continue to navigate 2020 and the uncertainty of this year, there are some things that we know for sure, and one is, that within every industry the consumer needs to feel ‘confidence’ in the service or product that they are seeking.

For our business, this means being able to demonstrate that we are providing a safe environment for Residents, and that we are evolving with appropriate changes as we receive new information and advice. Also, that we are continuing to provide a life as normal as possible for our Residents, with activities and support to help people continue to live a good life. Whilst we endeavour to portray this in everything we put out to the media and our social channels, it has a far more effective result when we gain online support from those who have experienced something with us.

In 2019 we invested heavily in our online presence with a new website and other digital marketing strategies which are now in place. Marketing is an industry which has almost been completely revolutionised in recent years, and it now requires frequent updates to build your online presence. The more updates a business has, particularly from external sources

which offer recommendations and reviews, the better a business does online as it is more recognised by Google. Why is recognition from Google important? Because, where do most of us head when we’re starting a new search? In many cases, straight to Google.



Birtley House receive an abundance of emails, handwritten letters and cards to show appreciation of the work we put in to provide an exceptional care experience for our Residents. Many of you reading this will have seen these in a folder which sits proudly in our entrance hall, bursting at the seams with this type of correspondence. We adore receiving these and we ourselves still use these traditional forms of communication. However, we recognise that we must work in harmony with the digital world which we now live in, and in order to do this successfully we have to ask for a different form of support from our connections and loyal supporters.

Can you help us?

We need your help with turning some of these ‘thank you’s’ and testimonials into digital form. It pains us somewhat to ask for this because we do so dearly enjoy everything we receive from our supporters, but it is now absolutely essential for business that we raise our presence online with digital reviews and support on various platforms. Sadly, the Google bots (virtual workers) which collect new data for Google to allow the search engine to decide who is proving popular amongst consumers, cannot recognise our much-loved traditional forms of review.

So, we kindly ask of you the reader, whether you are a Residents family member, friend, business associate or other, could you spare five minutes to leave us a positive review in some way and help us to move up in Google’s ranking criteria? This will help us to deliver confidence to those at the start of their search for a care provider. Your review doesn’t have to be from a recent experience. It could be to reference the care that you, or a loved one have received, your first or lasting impressions of Birtley House, something you like about our home or gardens, or any events you may have attended.

Here is a list of ways in which you can leave us a review.

Google reviews

Google really values this type of review and pays a lot of attention to what is posted here. Simply head to Google and type in Birtley House. Usually to the right hand of the page you will see this picture.

Notice the yellow stars and our current rating of 4.7*, by selecting where it says 15 Google reviews you will be given the option to submit your own review, quick and easy to do.



Facebook

- For those familiar users. Updating your status or checking in and mentioning Birtley in the tag would be wonderful e.g.
- Back to see Mum @birtley
- Enjoying the @birtley gardens with Dad
- So pleased we can visit @birtley once again
- Upload your own pictures of you and your loved one, or something you like in the gardens and tag Birtley House. These will then appear on our page.
- General reviews on our facebook page Birtley House Nursing Home



Please note, to do any of this you must have liked and be following our page first.

Carehome UK reviews

You can pick up the review cards in Birtley House reception area or we can post one to you.

- You can head to our website homepage, scroll down and click on 'Write review' on the Carehome UK logo which will bring up the review form.

carehome.co.uk
the leading care home review website

Birtley House Nursing Home
9.8 carehome.co.uk Review Score
55 reviews

19 Aug 2020: Mary (Daughter of Resident)
 My dear mother spent the last three months of her life at Birtley House. Knowing that she felt she...

 14 Jul 2020: A G (Daughter of Resident)
 Both my parents are residents and have been for 4 years. The staff are all very special and go...
[Read all 55 reviews](#)

[Write a Review](#)

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Carehome UK will then contact you to verify your review before publishing it. They do this to ensure it is genuine, unbiased and helpful for those who are considering care.

In the results of your collective efforts with this, we hope to see more people have the confidence to choose Birtley House as their new home. We are most grateful for any support here, and if you have any friends or family members who could also do the same, well that would be just wonderful.

Thank you,
Kerry Holloway, Marketing Manager



Other news...



Simon Whalley has remained

in the public eye this year and taken part in various news interviews with the BBC news, Channel 5 news, ITV, ITN, BBC Radio Surrey and there are further talks for more to come. Simon is raising awareness of the importance of getting the testing system working efficiently so that we can lead as normal as possible lives. He has also discussed the effects this is all having on our Residents, some who also featured on the news, and he continues to campaign alongside the Surrey Care Association, for the government to recognise that the Adult Social Care sector is of great use and advantage to the NHS and country as a whole if they choose to work with us, rather than disregard the private sector.



We encouraged 'Self Care September' in the house, to make a point of recognising that as humans we cannot pour from an empty cup. We asked all of our staff to become aware of the little things that they do for themselves in caring for their own needs and happiness, encouraging that if they weren't doing much, they should find some time to nurture themselves and do something that makes them feel good. Self-care is not selfish, and it is extremely important to look after yourself in order to continue caring for our Residents to the best of our ability, as well as to be able to continue supporting work colleagues. Whether that be to take a walk with a furry friend, have a pamper, enjoy some reading, do a little gardening, bake something or simply compliment a colleague. Ideas are endless and although they are simple, a little bit of 'me time' goes a long way with us all.

Sadly, our Macmillan efforts this year could not be what they have been in the past. We had to forgo our usual tombola and coffee afternoon and sent no invitations out to our usual supporters who have helped us to raise thousands over the years for this very important charity. Instead, we held a much smaller scale event for just our Residents and staff. Tina, Caroline and the Activities team still put up decorations and they worked hard to offer a selection of cakes to everyone individually, alongside a small raffle for a bit of fun. We set a target of £500 and exceeded this nicely, as although we were unable to host in the same way, we were able to send out a fundraising link to our supporters. The grand total stands at £750.49 which we are incredibly proud of and we would like to say a BIG THANK YOU to everyone who helped us reach this.



Staff news

Covid-19 has meant for many changes around the business operationally, impacting the roles of some of our staff which have had to adapt. We have been fortunate to take on new starters to help provide support where it is needed, all of whom have joined with optimism and strength of character, despite the circumstances. They have settled in very well and the team we have around us are stable and strong, pulling together throughout this pandemic, evolving as we have needed them to and going above and beyond in many cases. Our Residents are very lucky to have them, as are we, so we will finish this edition of 'House & Home' as we started it, with 'Gratitude' to all of our Birtley Heroes, we are so incredibly grateful to each and every one of you.



Birtley
House

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