

## *Wimbledon Plaque Unveiled*

On July 12<sup>th</sup> 1995 an English Heritage Blue Plaque was unveiled on the house at 1 Lauriston Road, Wimbledon, where Robert Graves was born and which was home for such a large part of his life.

It was unveiled by Lucia Graves, in the presence of her brother, William, and speakers including The Mayor of Merton, Councillor Bridget Smith, the Chairman of the English Heritage Commemorative Plaques Working Group, Francis Carnwath, and the writer and broadcaster Leonard Pearcey, who also organised the informal ceremony.

Among those looking on and attending the reception afterwards at 53 Queens Road, Wimbledon, were Robert's nephew Paul Cooper, Wendy Toye, Julian Glover, the Chief Reporter from the local Wimbledon papers, Jason Moore and Humphrey Carter from the Majorca Daily Bulletin, Paula McGirley from BBC Radio 4, Pauline Scudamore and Miranda Seymour, from English Heritage Dr Roger Bowdler and press officer Victoria Ribbans, Robert's last muse Julie Simon and her mother Joanna, and Peter Child who'd started the whole thing off by telephoning English Heritage over six years previously.

Having worked with Leonard Pearcey on The Merton Festival based in Wimbledon Theatre, Peter had been conscious that Wimbledon had been backward in honouring one of its most famous sons; it was seeing Robert's grave in the Deya churchyard shortly before buying a home in the village that prompted the blue plaque trail.

Peter was informed that nothing could be done until a nominee had been dead for 20 years or the centenary of birth, whichever earlier. Peter persevered, pointing out that the centenary of Robert's birth would be the ideal time for an unveiling. As Francis Carnwath said on the great day, Peter succeeded in beating the system.

Once English Heritage had agreed, the necessary permissions had to be obtained from the local authority and the owner of the freehold of the house (now in four flats), and we have to record the considerable cooperation of Dr Barrow and the residents.

The champagne reception was generously provided by Beeton Rumford (part of the P&O group), represented on the day by Managing Director, Andy Hardy and P&O Corporate Affairs Executive, Caroline Cousins; while chef Winston created supremely delicious miracles from the garage. The sound system and engineer for the occasion, Simon Honywill, were donated by R.G. Jones, limited and the whole occasion was recorded on video by CCC Wadlow (to buy a copy contact Nicholas Crean, telephone +44 (0)171 287 0833, fax +44 (0)171 434 4278). The local police kindly and effectively provided traffic control.

We also have to correct reports that Sir Derek Jacobi was present (he sent his apologies as he had final rehearsals for a new production at

Chichester). Nor was Spike Milligan there: he had accepted and planned to call in on his way to a BBC radio interview but became delayed and had to go straight to Broadcasting House.

As part of the ceremony, not many yards from the church where Robert was baptised, Lucia Graves read a message from her mother Beryl. Leonard Pearcey also read a message of good wishes from Her Majesty, The Queen and, at Beryl's request, Robert's poem 'My Name and I'.

*As reported by Leonard Pearcey*