

Daphne Berkovi chats to our new Chair of the RA



I was very fortunate in being able to secure some time with Emma Howard, fitting in with her heavy work schedule as the new Chair of our Residents Association and hearing about her varied and interesting career coupled with her vision for the HGS community.

Emma's early period started in the Suburb, where her parents rented a flat on the top floor of Meadway Court when she was born, and Emma recalled that Meadway Court had its own nursery in a basement room where "I loved going to collect my older sister." The family then moved out to Mill Hill when Emma was 2½, the family comprising five children (three girls, two boys).

Primary school in Mill Hill was followed by secondary school at St. Michael's Convent

Grammar School in North Finchley. Thereafter Emma studied Politics with German at Loughborough University.

After graduating from University, Emma spent a year teaching English as a Foreign Language in Germany near Frankfurt. She explained: "I then spent most of my career working in taxation, initially as a VAT Inspector with HM Customs & Excise, as was, before joining the profession as a VAT consultant.

I enjoyed a full and challenging career with top professional firms in London, and spent 17 years as a tax partner at BDO Stoy Hayward in Baker Street doing senior VAT roles. In my last four years, I was on BDO's Global Leadership Team with various responsibilities, which involved a lot of travelling.

My office was essentially in Brussels, and I also had the opportunity to develop our business in Africa. I travelled to Hamburg and Lucerne a lot in this role so my German came in useful at last. I retired in 2012 and now do some freelance consulting and property work."

So what brought Emma back to the Suburb? "Well I needed somewhere to rent short term in late 1989 and a flat in Waterlow Court belonging to a friend of my brother was available. I loved it there, and that was my first real taste of living in the Suburb. I then bought a cottage in Willifield Way in 1992; moved on to Corringham Road in 1996 by which time I was engaged to my husband, Peter Jenkins. We started a family in 1997 and have two sons (plus

more recently a dog – also male!). We moved to Meadway Close in 2004. Our sons attended King Alfred School where they had a fantastic time – my younger son is doing 'A' Levels this year and both my sons hope to go off to university this autumn."

When I asked Emma what she liked about the Suburb, she told me that "most of all I love the greenness, and the beautiful blossom in the spring time. There is no London suburb that can beat this one from that point of view. Also, we are so close to Central London and that was essential for me for work. I think this feels like a small town in the countryside, yet we can get everywhere really quickly, and there is lots going on in the local area as well as in Central London.

I feel very lucky to have the Heath Extension on our doorstep. I walk our dog every day and love the different parts of the Heath and also Big Wood. In fact, the more time I spend on the Heath, the more I appreciate it.

"Peter and I also really like the feeling of community here. I sometimes attend St Jude's or the Free Church for services and my husband is very involved with Proms at St Jude's as he heads up their sponsorship programme and is a Trustee. Tomorrow I will be helping out at the Summer Fair on Central Square which is a fantastic community event."

Similarly, in 2012 Emma's mother came to live at The

Orchard in one of their units and Emma related that she had seen at first-hand how brilliant this has been for her mother as she goes to events at Fellowship House several times a week, and loves the easy access to the local shops in Temple Fortune and to public transport, especially the tube at Golders Green and the H2 hopper bus.

Emma endorsed the ideology of Henrietta Barnett in looking after the full community of people on the Suburb. She says "This was amazingly far-sighted and I hope we can sustain and retain that in looking after people in our community."


So how did the new role of Chair of Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association transpire? "Well 18 months ago I joined the Roads and Traffic Committee of the RA. Previously I had been a Governor of Brookland Schools for some years and was also involved with the local Proms at St Jude's. I was then asked to join the RA Council standing in March 2017 and was quickly voted onto the Executive Committee of the RA and then Treasurer on a temporary basis (although I am still doing that too!). So I became immersed in the RA very quickly and realised that the RA was doing good things yet there was scope for improvement. So, I decided to take up the challenge and try to move things on, becoming Chair in March 2018."

Emma explained that there are some challenges to tackle,

including the recruitment of more volunteers. She would like to see greater involvement from the local community in areas such as some new blood on Council; increasing our membership numbers and thereby our influence; getting more people onto our standing committees (Events and Trees & Open Spaces in particular).

Equally Emma explained that: "I would like more open meetings so that Residents can attend on matters of local interest, e.g. Traffic issues and crime; pushing Barnet Council for a better refuse service." She is also passionate about improving links with local organisations, such as those represented at the recent and very successful Summer Fair on Central Square, including the local community library, HGS Archives, HGS Heritage, Abbeyfield, Fellowship House (for whom the RA collects donations) and Proms at St Jude's.

It was very apparent throughout our conversation that Emma's objective to foster a good community atmosphere was palpable. Despite being very new in her role, Emma brings not only a wealth of experience and enthusiasm but also the enormous energy needed to ensure that the tasks ahead will be realised.

We wish her success in her new position, and if you would like to support Emma and the RA by volunteering in any of the wide variety of roles, please contact her at: rachair@hgs.org.uk or on 8458 3883. She would be delighted to hear from you 

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