

It went from there...

Profile on Kate Webster, newly appointed Chair of Proms at St Jude's



Photo: Martin Webster

MARIE-CHRISTINE O'CALLAGHAN

Kate's association with the Suburb dates back to 1995 when she was appointed the deputy head of Henrietta Barnett School (HBS) and decided to live here because she wanted to be able to go for a walk without using a car. The proximity of the Heath and the architectural delights of the Suburb provided her with a plethora of interesting and enjoyable walks.

Kate was born in Peterborough and studied geography at Sheffield University before becoming a teacher. She first taught in a comprehensive and then in a grammar school which was in a deprived area and proved very challenging because of the socio-economic background of the students. HBS was a very different school; an all girls' school with students passionate about their education. While at HBS she was an acting head for two terms and the experience made her think that she could be a Headteacher. She was subsequently appointed Headteacher at Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School in Barnet, a comprehensive school which reflected the diversity of London's population. Kate was very happy there, doing a job which matched her passion for girls' education and allowed her to 'open doors for young women'. Besides, "no two days were the same" and "it

was very satisfying to see children (and staff) progressing, occasionally against considerable difficulties."

Kate retired in 2015 and eventually joined the Proms as a volunteer friends coordinator and, as she says: "it went from there." Kate loves to walk so it seemed a natural step to take on the programming of the Heritage walks and lead some herself – 'a bit like a geography field trip for adults except it's about history'. She also got involved in the Suburb Archives particularly in the research relating to the 1911 Census which, among other fascinating information, reveals where people who moved to the Suburb came from. She then became the chair of the Proms at St Jude's Education Committee which organises children's and family concerts, together with a number of Barnet schools and the help of Da Capo, a charity that believes that every child should have access to a quality music education. A highlight is the Schools' Prom which brings together almost 400 children from Barnet primary and secondary schools to perform in St Jude's. A series of workshops prepare the children for a high quality musical performance with professional musicians.

It was at this time that Richard Clegg, the then chair of Proms, who had steered the Proms through the difficult Covid period, was thinking of retiring

and Kate was asked if she would be interested in taking on the job. She did (eventually) say yes.

Kate hopes to induct herself in the role by listening to the people involved in the delivery of the Proms. She wants to consolidate and take things forward by reaching out to the next generation of participants and volunteers. She feels the need for generational renewal is vital for any organisation. Kate would love to do more about education and heritage and to continue to develop the core music and LitFest strands of the Proms Festival. She thinks that it's wonderful that the children's concert sold out and that the family concert was well attended. She also wishes to turn some of the parents into evening concert goers. So, watch this space, good things are about to happen...



Photo: Jeremy Coleman

HGS Synagogue welcomes new leaders

SIMONE HALFIN

Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue, or Norrice Lea as it is also known, was inaugurated in 1935 with 70 families. Now, with over 2000 adult members, and several hundred children, it is one of the most prestigious synagogues in England. July marked the beginning of a new chapter, with the appointment of Senior Rabbi Marc and Lisa Levene, and their daughters, as well as Community Rabbinic couple Rabbi Luis and Jodie Herszaf, together with their sons. Together with Cantor Avromi and Rochelle Freilich the new team is complete. Cantor Avromi, whose magnificent voice has raised all our spirits during the recent pandemic, has been part of the synagogue for many years.

Rabbi Levene was a Youth and Community Rabbi at the synagogue previously but left to take up a post at Belmont Synagogue for five years. He told me he and Lisa were exceptionally excited, and feel it is their purpose in life being appointed Senior Rabbi back in the Suburb after five years away. 'To develop and build and help grow such a flagship community is a dream job for us' were his words.

Discussing Covid, he felt it had decimated, like a tornado, everyone throughout the world and caused havoc, so every faith leader needed to work out how to bring people back to attending services and be part of their community again. As in Norrice Lea, people had got out of the habit of going to synagogue, and it was going to be hard to reverse that. Rabbi Levene felt his main job initially was to listen, to talk to as many of his congregants as possible and find out what they want both from the community leaders themselves, and from the synagogue. "It is about understanding what people want and how we can provide it." As with Church members also, he was firm in his belief that people should be part of a community, not just taking part in the religious services, but coming along to other activities as well.

Rabbi Luis and Jodie Herszaf are taking up their first post in the community since he qualified as a Rabbi. They have previously been very involved with youth and young people and, although originally from London, they have just arrived back from living and studying in Israel.

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