

featuring Richard Wakefield



Interviewing the ubiquitous Richard was never going to be a simple task; not least in having to persuade him (the reluctant founding Editor of Suburb News and still at the helm as publisher after 100 issues)

to talk about himself. His many local achievements are well known to most Suburb residents – particularly with our Residents Association, the HGS Trust, the Garden Suburb Gallery and, of course, Suburb News. So I was very pleased that this 100th issue milestone gave me the opportunity to ask him some personal questions.

Born on the Suburb, Richard lived here originally from 1936 to 1950 with his parents and sister, Katharine in what he describes as his ‘formative years’. These must have been idyllic times to have been children here – the freedom to walk or cycle through the woods, over the Heath and on virtually traffic-free streets. Sleeping in the Anderson air raid shelter, collecting shrapnel and watching doodlebugs (German flying bombs) flying over – what excitement for the young brother and sister!

After attending Child’s Way School, Katharine went on to Henrietta Barnett Junior and Richard to Leas House School (a pioneering self-governing boys prep school) in Kingsley Way. They then moved to Hadley Highstone 1950 when his father’s desire for a large garden won over against his mother’s love of the Suburb, the Speedwell Players and the HGS Lawn Tennis Club. Married at 22, Richard and his wife had a son and daughter, Peter and Candida, and moved several times in Hertfordshire.

Richard returned to 50 Willifield Way in 1973 with his new wife, Jocelyne. Ideally he would have wished to return sooner but, surprise, surprise, even then the house prices proved prohibitive. They moved to Hampstead Way with their baby daughter Olivia and Frederic was born soon afterwards.

Running an advertising agency, doing a great deal of travelling and keeping a house in Norfolk understandably kept his active involvement in Suburb matters to a minimum. Things changed

when Tony Mandelson – a regular visitor to The Wakefield Agency in Fleet Street – used his charm (when not selling advertising space for the Jewish Chronicle) to persuade Richard to join the RA Council in 1978.

I went on to ask Richard some questions concerning some of his roles for the Suburb over the subsequent years:

D Was it your idea to start Suburb News?

R No, I believe it was the brainchild of Neville Silver the RA Secretary at the time. It followed a much smaller RA Newsletter, edited by Alan Lawson, which ran from 1978-83. Despite considerable professional misgivings about whether a regular newspaper could be maintained, I became it’s editor, with Tony Mandelson getting the all important advertisers in.

D When was the first issue?

R It came out in the summer of 1983 and led with the story of the High Court Judgement on the Trust’s application to vary the Scheme of Management allowing it to charge freeholders for their share of the costs of running the Scheme. My early misgivings about finding sufficient news were soon put to rest as all the clubs and societies wanted to publicise their activities. This led me to reporting and photographing many of the events.

D Have there been any major problems you can reveal to us?

R I have nervous moments with almost every issue, wondering what mistakes might have got through. There was one occasion when I needed to change a front page story at the last minute, to read ‘Trust AGM Row, Chairman Resigns’. I phoned this through to the designer from abroad (no email then) only to find, when the paper arrived from the printer a few days later, it had become ‘Trust Age Row’. It was, of course, nothing to do with Lord MacGregor’s age.

D Was it distributed then, as now, by RA volunteers?

R Yes, there was a voluntary distribution group for years before the paper started. They delivered the RA Newsletter and other Suburb material. Without them Suburb News could not be distributed to every Suburb residence. They are now organised by Lorna Page who is so good at finding new volunteers.

D Are there any contributors who wrote for the first issue and still continue to write?

R Yes, Léonie Stephen, theatre critic. She is always forthright yet constructive. I do remember that she did something of a hatchet job on ‘The Taming of the Shrew’ in our launch issue.

D You are obviously very passionate about the Suburb. Which of your many achievements are you most proud of?

R I was quite pleased when, as Chairman of the RA Council, I managed to make it run on my 3F principles – Fun, Friendly and Efficient. Otherwise, it would have to be Suburb News which I hope has been more than a little helpful in keeping the Suburb community spirit alive.

D Is there another role you would like to have?

R Yes, to have the powers the Trust exercises over the exterior of our houses extended to their interiors. Tastes and fashions change but in my view it is sad to see the heart torn out of so many homes that were designed for living in by people who knew what they were about.



Henrietta Barnett and Leas House uniforms

D What one thing do you like most about the Suburb?

R The fact that, apart from a few over designed gardens and far too many cars, a walk along Willifield Way or Hill Top is hardly different from 50 years ago.

D Do you ever get tired of being recognised locally?

R I don’t think I am all that recognisable, partly because I have been behind the camera for nearly all the pictures in Suburb News since 1983. Only a couple of times, as RA Chairman, has my picture appeared when I really couldn’t avoid it.

D Do you have a favourite quiet spot here?

R There are many that bring back memories but the best is probably the end of my garden where I can sit looking across the pond, watching the passage of small birds using the hedge as a route from one side of the garden to the other. The hedge plants were chosen by Georgina Malcolm as my leaving gift when she took over from me as RA Chairman. Seven years on it’s now a real hedge.

D If there was a Richard Wakefield memorial bench, where would you like it to be?

R On the famous East Bank at Cley-next-the-Sea in Norfolk where I birdwatch whenever I can. A love of birds has hugely augmented my enjoyment of travel over much of the world. For that I can thank my uncle John who used to walk over from Temple Fortune Lane to be with us in the air raid shelter and who taught me about birds.



It was in the summer of 1979 that I bumped into Catherine Fleischmann who said she knew the ideal job for me. “Just ring up John Enderby (then Principal at the Suburb Institute). He’s currently looking for suitable young ladies.”

As our daughter, Sarah was due to start at the Garden Suburb Infants school in September, I thought it was about time I had a job and David, my husband, agreed with me! So I rang Mr Enderby who invited me for tea and a chat.

Although I am still not sure that he had a vacant post at the time, he offered me one there and then. Initially it was just for three hours a week and, as they say, the rest is history. I was there for 29 years until my retirement in December 2008.

The Institute has been a wonderful place to work, my colleagues, too numerous to list, became my friends and we have all supported each other in times of crisis, both for the Institute and personally. Never more so than in 2006 when our much loved son Christopher died very suddenly.

Christopher was born with a congenital heart condition which had been corrected with surgery when he was a child and again when he was 21. Both operations were lifesaving and carried out by Marc de Leval, who became Christopher’s mentor. Marc and his wife, Vicky were living on the Suburb and, coincidentally, Vicky also worked with me at the Institute retiring at the same time.

More than two years have passed since that terrible day and David and I, together with Sarah and Christopher’s wife Charlotte, decided to create a legacy in his memory.

On a family holiday in 2004 we all visited the peaceful and secluded Impalila Island situated in North Eastern Namibia – which forms the meeting place of four countries (Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana) and the converging of the mighty Zambezi and Chobe rivers. Only 11km long and 4km wide, this lovely island – with dramatic floodplains – is known for its amazing bird watching and outstanding fishing opportunities. Christopher was mad about fishing, hence our family visit. The trip was arranged by the travel specialists ‘Islands in Africa’ who support visitors integrating with the local community.

During our stay there we visited the island school and we learnt that they were having all sorts of problems with their computer and Christopher was able to help them out. Back at home he organised a shipment of computer equipment and persuaded DHL to take it free of charge to Johannesburg. ‘Islands in Africa’ offered to take care of the rest of the journey. After many months, by land, river and air, the crate of equipment was eventually received by the school. They were thrilled with it and said that they would be calling the new classroom with the equipment ‘The Chris Pace Computer Room’.

Sarah first suggested that we should continue and build on this project in memory of Christopher. He was such an energetic, positive person. His ill health never stopped him doing anything and we know he would have approved of our plans to finance the building of a resources room for the school and purchase much needed computer equipment.

So, last October we returned to Impalila and visited the school. We had the most wonderful reception. Dayne, the Community Liaison Manager with ‘Islands in Africa’, and Calvin, who lives on Impalila and is a tour guide there, are helping us and have already secured a promise from the Namibian Education Authority that they will match pound for pound any money we raise.

Much has already been achieved. Sarah has already staged several fundraising events in the village where she lives in Bedfordshire. Thanks to Joel Clyne we have now launched the website www.thechrispacetrust.org. Our application for charitable status has been approved (Charity No. 1128044) and construction work is expected to commence soon after the present high floods have subsided. Donations totalling over £15,000 have already been received towards our target and we do hope that more people will be interested in helping with this very worthwhile project in a part of the world where children need basic educational resources.

You can contact me by emailing silvia.pace@ukonline.co.uk.

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