

Suburb News *in conversation with...*

...Professor Louise Scheuer

Peter Falk chats to Louise about the loves of her life – anatomy, music and family

Louise moved to the Suburb soon after she got married and has lived here for over 50 years. She has been an academic all her working life and is still working on her series of reference books on *Juvenile Osteology* (the study of the bones of young people and children).

She was born Louise Withington in Macclesfield in 1933 of English and Scottish ancestry. She had two younger sisters, one of whom died very young, and the other born just before the war. Her father's work meant they soon moved to a village near Stoke on Trent.

Her formative years, she says, were during WWII. Her father, a surveyor, was away much of the week inspecting bomb-damaged buildings. Neither of her parents was practical and Louise got involved in practical matters, for example fixing taps. Food shortages and rationing during her childhood have, she said, "marked me for life," and she is horrified by the modern habit of wasting food.

Louise's interest in music and walking lies in her childhood; her father was a good pianist and she too took it up. She was brought up on a classical repertoire and leisure at home often involved listening to Dad, who also performed in the mornings in his dressing gown. Louise was keen, soon progressed and reached Grade 8.

Dad was also a fanatical fell walker and frogmarched his children on training walks; going on day treks to the

Snowdon area and getting home late at night.

She developed an interest in anatomy while specialising in science at her girls grammar school in Birmingham and in 1952, after Higher School Certificate, she went straight to Bedford College, the first women's HE college, to study Zoology & Physiology.

Opportunity knocked when she met the Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine who was looking for a research assistant and Louise jumped at the chance. She worked on the nerve supply of the larynx and obtained her PhD in 1959.

Maybe music is the food of love as she met her husband, Peter Scheuer, at the music society performing in a concert in the hospital, with Louise playing the piano and Peter, the cello. With a Professor of Chemistry keen on the clarinet they searched the repertoire for a trio involving piano, cello and clarinet and found Beethoven's opus 11. It was an excuse to spend time together and they married in March 1960 in St Pancras Town Hall.

Peter, from a musical Viennese-Jewish family, was a lecturer at the school and his academic career led him to New York a year later. Louise found work at the Natural History Museum studying 'the sexual behaviour of the male cat' using a nerve-staining technique as used on the larynx. They toured the USA in late 1963, returning and settling in the Suburb in Holyoake Walk.

With the arrival of children, Robert and Edward, Louise took time off work to start raising the family. The boys went to Brookland School and in 1971 the family moved to Northway backing onto Big Wood, where they lived for 36 years.

Louise returned to work and eventually moved to the Department of Anatomy at St Thomas' Hospital. In those days when bones were discovered, they were taken to an anatomy department.

A particular find was a group of Romano-British bones near Peterborough, which included baby, child and adult bones. This was Louise's 'breakthrough' as there was little data on juvenile bones. In 1980 she co-authored a much-quoted paper on ageing in juvenile bones.

A few years later she initiated a study of a collection of documented bones (i.e. of known sex and age) at St Brides Church, Fleet Street. She and Sue Black, who had joined the department, obtained a grant from the Leverhulme Trust to reorganise and conserve these skeletons. They built a lab in the crypt, collecting a mass of data for an historical research project.

They left the department following the merger with Guy's Hospital, and Louise returned part-time to the Royal Free. After retirement, she continued to teach and to appear as an expert witness in court, and was appointed an Honorary Professor at the Department of Anatomy

and Human Identification at Dundee University.

In 1999 the Foreign Office invited her to join a multi-disciplinary team as a forensic anthropologist to identify the bodies of Muslim Albanians shot in Kosovo, then part of Serbia. The aim was to investigate possible war crimes and return the identified bodies to their families. The results went to the International Criminal Court.

The team worked in terrible conditions and had to provide their own generator and water bowser. They lived in one house and, as the only woman, Louise slept separately in the kitchen. They were always guarded by UN troops.

As the boys grew older, Louise returned to the activities of her youth. She got up early most mornings for a swim but was back for breakfast. She took up running after seeing Edward competing in the Hyde Park fun runs, and ran in the St. Thomas' student team in 5K cross-country races.

After her husband Peter died in 2006, she got involved in the running of HGS Fellowship and was Acting Chairman during the challenging time rebuilding the property in Willifield Way, and she remains on the management team. Louise is a member of the RA Conservation and Amenities Committee, and sits on the Grants and Amenities Committee of the HGS Trust.

She also joined a team of ladies who go on regular walking holidays, making the training in Snowdonia

worthwhile. Her Dad would be proud. She can no longer play the piano, but instead gets pleasure from the chamber music concerts at Wigmore Hall.

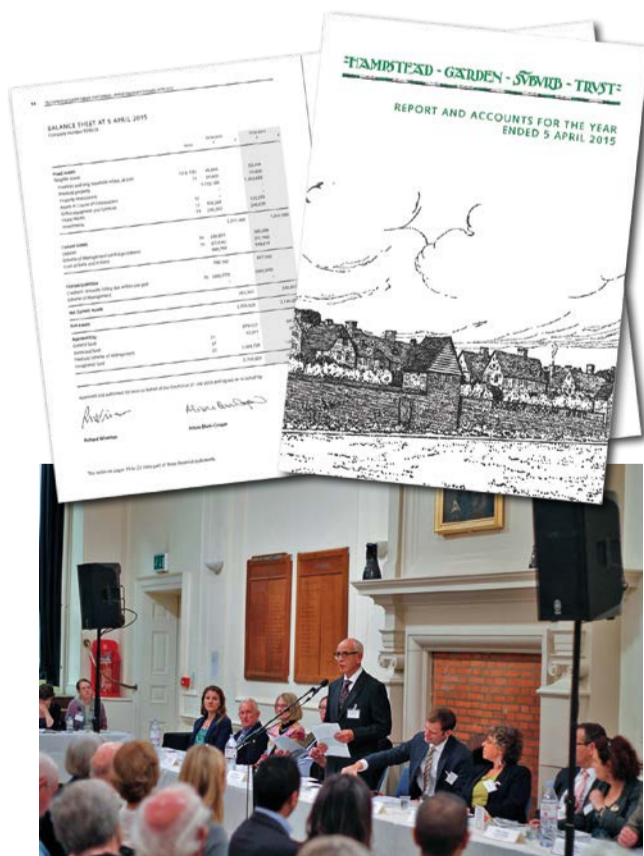
Although retired, Louise never stopped working. Together with her colleague Sue Black, she is working on a second edition of a reference

book on the development of the juvenile skeleton and has also produced a textbook, and a laboratory and field manual.

She moved to Willifield Way in 2007 and is in regular contact with her sons Robert, in London with his partner, and Edward, in San Francisco with his American wife and three daughters **S**



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