

Deborah Hamlin (2 February 1946 to 13 July 2020)

Deborah Mary Baker (or 'Debbie' as she was known to many) was born on 2 February 1946, daughter to Rex and Joan. As the oldest of three children, she grew up on Dartmoor with her brother, Richard, and sister, Charlotte.

Living on Dartmoor, from a young age Deborah developed a passion for horses, especially Dartmoor ponies, owning ponies called 'Be Be', 'Molly' and 'Star'. She would often attend Pony Club gymkhanas, showjumping events, the local hunt meets and, the event of the year, the 'Hunt Ball'.

Deborah attended Tavistock Grammar School where she was an outstanding player of hockey and tennis. As a member of the school's drama group, she played a formidable Gwendolen Fairfax in 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. The school participated in exchange visits with Tavistock's twinned town of Pontivy in Brittany, where Deborah was fortunate to be paired with the daughter of the Mayor and so experienced the privilege of staying in the official residence. These exchange visits helped to develop Deborah's lasting love of France and the French language.

Deborah left home and moved to London at the age of 18 to work for the Emergency Bed Service, part of the King Edward VII's Hospital Fund which was an occupation advertised in the Daily Telegraph and considered a suitable career for young ladies in the mid-1960s. In 'Swinging London', Deborah shared a flat with a friend near Gloucester Road and enjoyed all that life had to offer, frequenting King's Road and Kensington High Street in one of the city's hippest and culturally productive neighbourhoods. Deborah maintained her interest in tennis, participating in tennis evenings in Notting Hill and Putney. However, keen never to lose touch with her beloved Dartmoor, Deborah would visit Devon often.

In her married life, Deborah moved out to the London suburbs in order to enjoy a less frenetic life. Deborah was a loving Aunt to Christopher, Benjamin and Timothy, Stepmother to Katy and Andrew, and Godmother to Georgie.

Deborah initiated the St. Helier Hospital bed service with her expert knowledge, honing her professional management skills there over 17 years. This was followed by a further 14 years working at executive level for the RNIB. After retiring from the RNIB, Deborah worked as interim manager and director in the voluntary sector with organisations such as Look, the Stroke Association and SeeAbility. She also sat as a governor on the Board of the RNIB Sunshine House School, a specialist school for blind and partially-sighted children with significant learning difficulties.

Socialising was a key aspect of Deborah's life, often chewing over the public events of the week with friends in addition to debating issues great and small. She loved reading as well as enjoying good food and wine. Deborah regularly attended the South of England Show at Ardingly, maintaining her interest in her beloved mountain and moorland ponies despite

sometimes wet conditions. Rain was unfortunately also a common feature of another event on her social calendar, the annual international tennis tournament held in Eastbourne. The Championships at Wimbledon always followed, accompanied by Pimm's and picnics and an opportunity to watch one of Deborah's tennis idols, Roger Federer, play on Centre Court.

Becoming a member of Sutton Tennis and Squash Club in 1972, Deborah remained there until 2008. She was a member of the management committee, taking on the roles of Ladies' Team Captain and the Tournament Coordinator for satellite tournaments. It was during this period that Deborah first became a Surrey Tennis Councillor, serving from 1989 to 1994, and sitting on both the Competitions Committee and the Club Liaison Committee. She then started her second stint in 2017, subsequently becoming chair of the Communications and Venues Committee enabling her to pursue her interest in volunteer-run clubs and the increasing pressures they face. Deborah was also a member of the Surrey Patrons Association for many years, an organisation which supports various tennis activities and young tennis players in Surrey.

Deborah joined Reigate Lawn Tennis Club in 2008. She became Chair of the club in 2012, a role she retained until her death. Throughout her tenure, Deborah was a visibly active member of the club, attending many social events and regularly supporting the 'finals days' of club tournaments. She oversaw numerous improvements to the club's facilities such as the addition of floodlighting to the remaining unlit courts and the installation of five artificial clay courts, thereby maximising the availability of the club's courts in nearly all weathers and light conditions. She also played a key part in the renovation of the bungalow to establish a fitness studio. Deborah brought back into the club's ownership the annual Open Tournament for which she was Tournament Director for several years, receiving several positive reviews from participants, and she oversaw the rise of the Men's First Team, the 'Reigate Rhinos', all the way to the National Tier of Team Tennis. Deborah fought for the club to receive the acknowledgement it deserved, culminating in receipt by the head coach of 'Performance Coach of the Year' from Surrey Tennis in 2018 and by the Reigate Rhinos of the 'Team of the Year' award at the Reigate and Banstead Sports Awards in 2019.

Deborah died peacefully at St George's Hospital, Tooting, on 13 July 2020. She will be remembered as someone who was active, reliable and successful. She was a popular and respected leader of her staff and committees, leading from the front and installing an ethos of doing things properly. She stood up for what she felt was right even if it was at some cost, taking responsibility for any difficult issues and never side-stepping an important decision. She will be remembered with affection and admiration.