

## Sally Mowbray

Sally has led a full and rich life despite having had rheumatoid arthritis since the age of 31. Her hands are the worst affect-ed joints although surgery in 2012 helped. She firmly believes that keeping fit and active is key to staving off the worst effects of the disease and, with her tireless dog walking, she must know every inch of Kingwood Common. Husband, Pete, and their two sons are terrifically helpful and supportive when Sally can't use her hands properly but sometimes it is the sheer frustration that she finds most difficult. Their sons, Oli and Ross, now young men, were just a toddler and a young baby when they moved to Peppard 24 years ago. What a brave thing to do. Oli has now left home although Ross re-mains – for the time being. The family are a close-knit unit and Oli's girlfriend has been welcomed into the fold. On a sadder note, after three years of caring, Sally's mother finally passed away very recently.

Almost by accident, 20 years ago Sally became secretary at Peppard School when the then headteacher, Anne Jar-vis, had a computer problem and asked if any of the young mothers could help out. Sally duly did and ended up as secretary for the next five years before handing over the reins to Fiona Hilton.

Sally's passion is volunteering for Berkshire Search and Rescue Dogs. They help police find vulnerable and missing people – typically people with dementia or perhaps mental health sufferers who are lost in the countryside. It could take hundreds of people to search woodland thoroughly and yet each trained dog can search a large area much faster. They are trained to search for any human scent and then return to their owner and bark or jump to indicate they've found something; it's really like a big game to them. The volunteer must then assess what they've found and, of course, the dog is duly rewarded. In Sally's group there are 30 volunteers and 35 dogs of which 10 are fully qualified operational dogs. Most of the dog breeds would have been working dogs in former times: the criteria are brains and energy. Sally's springer spaniel certainly fits that description. Occasionally the volunteers will be accompanied by police but normally would be relied upon to contact the police or an ambulance if and when they find someone. Unfortunately, people can be found who have been injured or even, sadly, died. Sally jokes that she dreads subjecting a person to her first aid skills!

There are three types of search – air scenting, ground scenting and water scenting. Aster, who Sally has had since she was a puppy, is the second dog that she has trained and is learning ground scenting. The average dog takes 12-24 months to train: it takes an immense amount of time, but over-training can be a problem too. One of Sally's dogs started to get bored but, after a short break, commenced with renewed enthusiasm. Currently Aster is training for route and path searching to find a person hidden up to 25m either side of a 2km path in 60 minutes: most missing people would fit into this category. When she reaches the next level, she will be trained to search an area of 50 acres (about 28 football pitches) and find a per-son within 90 minutes. Sally herself has to have lots of training too, for example in first aid, in navigation, in water safety, and meets with her fellow volunteers on a weekly basis to practise: this could mean sitting in deep woods for several hours during the night – quite pleasant on a fine July night, not so much fun during a rainy November! Her youngest son, Ross, is also a team member.

Before this, Sally volunteered for the Childhood Eye Cancer Trust (CHECT), to help people affected by retinoblastoma, a rare form of eye cancer, after a family member suffered from this. She is adamant that everyone, young or old, should have their eyes checked regularly. She would visit families with children who suffered to offer help and support.

For the last 19 years, Sally has assisted in running Drink-Driver Rehabilitation Scheme courses for drivers banned by a magistrates' court. Sadly, their not-for-profit company came up against stiff commercial competition and could not survive in a cut-throat market and Sally's role ended in August of this year.

Is there anything left for Sally to do? Undoubtedly the answer is - Yes. If she ever tires of dog training (which seems unlikely) she will inevitably throw her energies into something else.

**Rita Hadgkiss**