



■ Mat Schwitzer threw himself into Highgate's community life Picture: Polly Hancock

Loved ones mourn loss of le président

Community man fled Nazis on brink of world war

by Imogen Blake

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Friends and family have paid tribute to an "exceptional" community figure who fled from the Nazis on the brink of the Second World War.

Former Highgate Society chairman Mat Schwitzer died peacefully at his Shepherd's Hill home aged 97 last week.

The retired chemical engineer, who escaped aged 21 from occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, threw himself into all aspects of community life in Highgate, where he lived for 62 years.

His son William Schwitzer, remembered: "My father could keep company with anyone, delighted in interesting company and didn't suffer fools.

"He was an ideas person, he cared nothing for physical things and he didn't have cherished possessions. He had seen life was too short, and the tragedy shaped his character and made him stronger."

Born in 1917, Mr Schwitzer grew up in an "idyllic" Bratislava where he studied the equivalent of 16 A-levels.

Before completing a degree in chemical engineering at a Prague university, he fled the country by train and shared a compartment with actor Herbert Lom, the star of *The Pink Panther* films. Mr Schwitzer reached Britain safely but he

“ He was like a loving father, uncle and grandfather all rolled into one. Whenever he was in the room, I wanted to go and talk to him

never saw his parents again.

William Schwitzer, 55, of Hornsey Lane Gardens, Highgate, said: "It was painful for him, particularly because he lost his family in the war but because it was somewhat idyllic in his schooldays, so with his sharp memory it was quite painful for him to look back."

Following his retirement in the 1970s, he took up an active membership of most of Highgate's clubs and societies.

As chairman of the Highgate Society in the 1970s, he was at the head of its campaign to fight plans to widen Archway Road, which were abandoned as a result.

He supported his wife of 62 years, the late Joan Schwitzer, in founding the Hornsey Historical Society, of which she was president.

He later published his own history book, *Slovakia: The*

Path to Nationhood, in 2002 and returned to his homeland many times after the fall of communism.

The multi-linguist, who spoke five languages fluently, was also a founding member, and later le président, of the society's French Circle, as well as a former chairman of the Highgate Horticultural Society.

Friend and former circle leader Elizabeth Woodman, of Southwood Park, Highgate, said: "He was a very fair, and very wise, man. He was quite an exceptional person. He was like a loving father, uncle and grandfather all rolled into one. Whenever he was in the room, I wanted to go and talk to him."

Philosophy was among Mr Schwitzer's great passions and for two years, this February and in 2013, he presented The Mat Schwitzer Lecture on British philosophy at the Highgate Society's headquarters in South Grove.

Last year, Mr Schwitzer composed his own epitaph for the *Ham&High's* weekly *My Highgate* column. It read: "Husband, father-of-four, grandfather-of-six and philosopher, which enriched his life and made his love for his family deeper."

Mr Schwitzer is survived by children Laura, Steven, Veronika and William and his six grand-children.

His funeral will be held at All Saints Church in Talbot Road on Monday at 12.30pm.

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OBITUARIES

Denis Brook Taylor

Born in Chorlton cum Hardy, Manchester of parents Cecil Arthur Taylor and Laura Deakin, and had a brother, Donald.

Denis, sadly, passed away quietly on 18 October 2014.

He is a Chartered Accountant FCA 1951, formerly of Fitzjohns Ave, Hampstead and latterly of St Johns Wood Road. Uncle Denis to many children and godchildren. Loved and respected by all his friends and colleagues.

Funeral service at the West London Crematorium (Kensal Green Cemetery) on 6th November at 11:15.

Reception at Lords Tavern, St Johns Wood Road at 13:00

Please donate to your favourite charity, in the name of Denis or to one of Denis' three favourites:

The Gurkha Welfare Trust,
The British Legion Poppy Appeal or the
The Royal Air Forces Association.



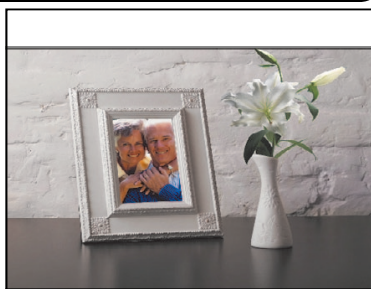
Gurney-Diana (née Varnon)

Died at home on 28th October 2014 aged 97. Diana retained her lively intellect, her interest in people and the world, her capacity for friendship and her charm, to the end of her life.

Her funeral will be on Thursday 6th November, 1pm at St Mark's Church, St Mark's Square, NW1. No flowers please, but donations if wished may be made to one of Diana's chosen charities.

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