



## Friends of HighGround: VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Chris Eberhardie – Founder member  
of the Friends of HighGround

### Tell us a bit about yourself.

I am a retired nurse lecturer. I spent 40 years in nursing and for thirty of those I served in the Territorial Army nursing reserve. I've nursed soldiers of all generations who had suffered traumatic injuries in many different conflicts – from Far East prisoners of war to the Falklands and Northern Ireland. Although I'm not a neuro rehabilitation nurse I developed an interest in neuro rehabilitation. I have a lot of interests but things that I'm actively involved in are mainly to do with history and the Forces, charity work and travel.

### What prompted your interest in Horticultural Therapy?

For over twenty years I worked at the Atkinson Morley Hospital which was next door to the Wolfson Medical Rehabilitation Centre. That had a garden in which patients spent time with the occupational therapists. They didn't have a designated Horticultural Therapist – as an occupation it's fairly recent – but the patients benefited from being in the garden. It's not a new thing. In the casualty clearing stations in World War One, the nurses got the patients to do bits of gardening and help lay gardens out – the idea has been around for a long time. I was very much an action woman when I was nursing. Surgery and trauma – that was my bag – but as I matured I wanted to know what happened to patients afterwards. The fact that we can use all kinds of different ways of getting help and healing to people is interesting in itself.

### How did you come to be involved with HighGround?

It was entirely by accident. I noticed Anna on the staircase at the Society of Apothecaries in London. You can always tell when someone has not been there before because they're completely taken by the building and all the wonderful exhibits. I introduced myself and we began to talk. I realised she wasn't a doctor and when she told me she was a Horticultural Therapist I just knew that wanted to know more.

### Did you have much of an interest in horticulture yourself?

I can't say I'm a born gardener. I like looking at gardens more than working in them! I suppose it's something I've come to, later in life. I've just got a garden of my own and I'd really like it to be a memory garden, so there is some work to be done.

### What aspect of the work HighGround does resonates most with you?

My initial interest was in the Horticultural Therapy side. But I also like the idea that the outdoor sector can be used for employment. It's all very well for health care professionals to put our servicemen back together again but what do they do then?, HighGround's work is not just about the wounded; it's about people being valued for what they've done, and helping them to re-purpose skills they learned in the military so they can live their lives after they've come out of service. HighGround can help those men and women whose skills are not immediately useful in civilian life - there's not much call for mortar men in civvy street is there? But many of their skills are transferable particularly in the land-based sector.

### As a founder member of the Friends of HighGround what do you hope to achieve?

I'd like to see the Friends expand and become more of a community in a way which enables friend and volunteers to engage with HighGround but also get something back. There are people within the hierarchy of HighGround who are dedicated to the corporate end of things – the really big fundraising that has got to go on, but I would like to see communities everywhere engaging with us and it's up to the Friends to do that. I'm not very good at just asking people for money but people like me, on the lower decks, can actually do something useful whether its networking, getting the word out about what HighGround does or organising an event. Everyone has the potential to help. My husband was in the Parachute Regiment and their fundraising usually involved things that were really tough and stretched the limits. I mean, I can't see me or anybody in my immediate entourage rowing the Atlantic or leaping out of an aircraft or running the marathon wearing full body armour! They're inspirational but there are plenty of other things that people like us can do even if it's just having tea or coffee with a friend and donating what we would have spent having coffee out.

### What's next on the agenda for you?

In September the Friends of the Tenth – the Parachute Regiment – are unveiling a memorial to the men from their Battalion who went to Arnhem 75 years ago and didn't come back. My husband was due to be dropped into Arnhem but delayed by being on a course, he should have been on the last lift, but the fog was so dense that they couldn't fly and a Polish battalion went instead. The link with the Parachute Regiment, this Arnhem Memorial is special to me but particularly so now that HighGround is going to be taking care of the garden around the memorial.



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For more information about HighGround's services please contact Anna Baker Cresswell  
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