Heddy Friedmann (Herta Wagener), born 1909 in Hamburg, died 2007 in London. Emigrated to the UK in March 1938 and joined the synagogue in 1959.

Heddy Friedmann was interviewed by Dr Bea Lewkowicz on the 20th of March 2000.

When were you born?

In 1909. I am 91 now. Terrible [laughs] - I can't believe it myself. And I was brought up in a middle-class family, my parents were not academics. My sister Bertha was an academic, she was very clever, and we went to the Lyzeum, all of us. I finished my time at the school with 16 and went to a *Jugendheim* in Charlottenburg, to become a kindergarten teacher. I was so good in arts and crafts, so ended up teaching the people at the college who were not good at it. The teachers were not allowed to give them *Nachhilfestunden*. So, I did that - I was very proud. A young girl, I was teaching them already, so that was the beginning of my profession really. All my work was exhibited in the headmistress's room. Anyway, I finished my two years at the *Jugendheim* and went back to Hamburg and became a *Handarbeit* teacher. From there, I went back to Berlin to the Fröbelhaus to do my arts and crafts and I became an arts and crafts teacher. And then I started teaching, next to where Einstein lived, next door to Einstein was a Kinderheim and Miss Feiertag was the headmistress there. Oh, I was going to ask you, to whom was your mother married?

To my father called Lewkowicz.

Why is she Friedmann?

It's her maiden name.

Ah, that's it, because at that school was a Friedmann and we called him Fridolin, and he lived here. I was thinking your mother was related to Fridolin. Anyway, I went there over the summer because my sister-in-law, my friend Lotte Friedmann, lived there. She later became my sister-in-law because I married her brother. So, we have been friends for many years - she's still alive, she is 94 this year. I was teaching there and then Hitler came, and I could only work in a Jewish school and I joined the Karolinstraße, the Jewish school. And I was teaching there for three years. I still have a pupil living here in Hampstead Garden Suburb. Miriam married my husband's brother.

So, you were a civil servant?

Yes.

Until '33 and then you were dismissed?

No, I never worked in a non-Jewish surrounding, they were all Jewish schools. What I did actually, and that was why I was dismissed, *Arbeitsdienst* they called it, for young people who left school and didn't have anywhere to go, they came to the *Arbeitsdienst*. That was just before Hitler. I had a very nice colleague, she was a bookbinder, she was teaching the children, and I did all sorts of things related to crafts. That's where I got dismissed, it was a *Berufsschule*. In this school I made friends with a man who offered me a position at the Bauhaus school, to design toys for children. Anyway, I did not accept the offer. My parents didn't allow me to go, Hitler was already in power. So, I went to the Jewish school. Lotte became engaged to another Friedmann, Hans Friedmann, she didn't want to lose her name, she liked her name too much. He was the son of a composer who composed Jewish songs in Berlin, Isaac Friedmann. Very musical family. I was teaching for three years and Paul came over from West Africa, Sierra Leone.

Where did you meet him?

Oh, I met him in Hamburg, but through Lotte, the family Friedmann invited me often to Bielefeld. So, I was quite at home with the Friedmanns. And we became engaged in 1936, and he went back to Africa alone, which annoyed Lotte very much. She said, why do you stay here in Hitler's country, you should have gone with him straight away, but he wanted me to have a better house, he lived in a flat in Freetown. He was specialising in textiles, but he worked with Karstadt before he left with all the directors in 1933. And he was brought up in this department store like his father.

You said his father owned a store in Bielefeld, what was it called?

Friedmann, Franz Friedmann. Paul came back in 1938. I had finished school a year before and came here to learn English. But my teachers said, I am a nice girl, but I will never learn English.

How did you arrange to come over?

Just with passport, nothing more. From Hamburg to London, I lived in London for three months. I lived in Walm Lane, off Edgware Road in Cricklewood. Anyway, then I went to Africa with my husband in '38 via Morocco. I lived for two years in Freetown, Sierra Leone, then the war broke out. We came back during the war to see my parents here. I wasn't allowed to go back then because Hitler was already in Dakar. Paul came back and then went to Nigeria, alone, and I joined him there, alone. Alone on a ship, you know, and during the war. Had a big convoy, you know. 1944.

So, between 1939 and 1944 you were in England?

1941. Two years I was in Freetown, 1938 to 1940. And we lived here in the country with my parents when my sister's school was evacuated.

So, when you came back from Freetown, your parents were already here and your sister?

Yes, my sister was at the school, she was teaching there. Did you hear about Gerhard Hoffnung, he was a caricaturist and a musician? Annette is still alive, his wife. He was very young, 36, and very gifted.

I joined my parents near Shrewsbury in a place which had the lavatories outside and was rather primitive. Anyway, my husband came back, but his ship was torpedoed, there were only a few people on the ship, 300 miles from Ireland. My sister had the flu, in my parents' house. She waved a telegram when I came back from visiting friends in Shrewsbury. She waved a telegram that he came back, she said, don't take your coat off, run to the station, he will arrive any minute - and so he did. He had survived it, and he left again without me, unfortunately. In 1944 I joined him and had Ruth in 1945.

Were there other German refugees in Freetown?

I'll tell you what, there were some Germans, not Jewish, and they were certainly interned. And I worked in the post office, I sent letters. And the silly English men told them that their letters to their wives and so on were censored by me, silly! I read it in the letters, they were furious, how can that Englishman do that, silly. Anyway, I made friends with other ladies, Anne Hamilton, a lovely person. Then Paul and I went to South Africa. But they didn't want us in South Africa, there was the fifth column here in Europe, so they were afraid. Anyway, so we took the boat and back to England. Right through, past Freetown, that was good.

When did you get back?

It must have been 1941 or 1942. And then Paul went alone, to Africa, and I followed him in 1944.

And your daughter was born in '45, and then, after that?

I took her home, the war was over. 1945 in May the war was over, and I left in June with her and all other mothers with children on the boat. And it was so nice when I came to Freetown, Anne Hamilton, the friend, she brought a young man along, he was a soldier, stationed in Freetown. But he had to leave. An English soldier, he was a young man, he was in prison when he was 16 years old for something he had stolen, a bicycle. And Anne was a very religious person, and she took him on, so to say. And she brought him on the boat, she introduced me to him and he was on the same boat. 'He looked after me', she said, 'here is a young man and he will look after you'. Every morning, 6 o'clock he brought me boiling water for the milk bottle, it was very nice. And then I came to Liverpool with the cot and the baby, and he said goodbye to me. I arrived in London, my sister met me, and my father was still alive, which was nice, he loved my daughter. He died when she was one and a half or two. And I took her back to Africa when she was three. I eventually came back, and Paul came back in 1951 for good.

Until then he was in Africa?

He was here when Frank was born in '48, but left again and I lived here, rented a house here. So that is my story.

How were your parents coping?

They lived with my sister, very well, daddy did the shopping, they all knew him and he went to learn English here in the institute with other judges and doctors and so on, they made friends. When they came back from the classes they went shopping and, in the shop, they said: 'the boys are coming', they called them the boys.

And economically?

My husband helped. But living together, they didn't need an extra house, and then my sister bought the house for £1100. This one was £5000. And what is it now? £400,000 or so. [laughs]. I paid it, £5,000, I still see myself coming here, the people who lived here sold the house to us. We moved in 1951, I think. Frank was already 3 years old, and Ruth was 6.

Did your parents belong to any synagogue when they lived here?

No, they didn't. My mother was brought up quite religiously.

Yes, can you just tell me about your parents' background?

My mother came from a religious background, and my grandfather was a fur maker, in the fur trade, but part of his time he used in the temple, in Hamburg they called the synagogue 'Tempel'. In Kohlhöfen, Hamburg.

Was it liberal, orthodox, reform, do you remember?

I can't tell you.

Was there an organ?

Not very orthodox I don't think so.

Was there a choir?

I can't tell you. I went there quite often. My grandpa, he liked us to come. I got my religious education through him, you know, all the festivals, like *Sukkoth* and all that, we celebrated *Chanukkah* with him. Anyway, that was him, his name was Tisch, Emil Tisch. His wife was Fanny, she was born here. My grandmother was born here.

Why was she born here?

Because she eloped, she and her boyfriend. And married here, and then they went back. And then my father's background, he was a bookbinder, he was very artistic, and he drew very well, too. We saw more of the Tisches, we were closer to the Tisches than to the Wagners, but they were lovely cousins, who went to America and we saw them here as well. That was their background. They worked hard. Lots of children.

What about their social circles?

Funny you ask that. They were very keen on theatre, and they always belonged to the theatre in Hamburg, and my father-in-law lived a little while in Hamburg. He got very friendly with my father's brother. The beautiful Ferdinand, they called him. And their hobby was theatre. My father, I don't think he took part in it, but the uncle and my father-in-law, funny, isn't it? They knew already my family before he knew me. Before I was born even.

You said your father worked in printing?

Yes, he started in 'Hammerich and Lesser' it was called in Altona, and he belonged to the Rotary Club, he was a mason and later on, when he gave up, buying himself out so to say or being paid out, he bought his beautiful house, there's one big picture on the landing. He let rooms, flats, and made a living and then he went into some paperwork, I think. My sister went to university, we all had college education, so he must have earned quite good money. They were very keen for us to learn. That was it.

Anything else you think is important of that pre-war period?

Not really. I saw the Kaiser. He opened a garden exhibition in 1914 and then we went to see my father near Köln, where he was in an office. He was a very small man, couldn't carry a gun, so they left him in the office to do some office work. We all joined him and we had Christmas there with the other people in the barracks, it was nice. And we spent New Year's Night in the Dom in Köln. It must have been 1916, I was seven years old.

Can you tell me about it, what do you remember?

I just remember the choir in the church, it was lovely. We went to Koblenz where the Mosel went into the Rhein.

Did you celebrate Christmas with your family?

No. We had a Christmas tree for our maid. It was delightful for us [laughs], the Christmas tree in the house, in her room. No, we didn't. We had the goose, certainly, Christmas is goose time, but not really. *Chanukkah* always comes together. I had a very happy childhood.

Let's come to the period when you came back from Africa and started to get involved with the synagogue.

We joined the synagogue and Frank had his Bar Mitzvah.

Why did you join Belsize Square? How did you hear about it?

Might be through friends.

So, you joined because you were looking for a synagogue for your son to have a Bar Mitzvah?

Yes, sure. Here in the suburb is a very religious one and we are liberals, so we joined here and we were very happy here, it was good. Frank was 13, it was 1959, something like that.

What was your first impression?

Oh, a very happy one, a very happy atmosphere. I only remember it was *feierlich*, you know. I liked to go there. We went there sometimes on Friday night or Saturday morning. Frank had a very nice teacher who is still alive, actually. His name is Martin Lorenz, he is still alive, he

was Frank's private teacher for the preparation for the synagogue. He is in a wheelchair, but he is going painting, and he is going to the day centre in - what's the name of the road… Anyway, we were quite involved in things here, we decorated tables for parties in the synagogue and then I did some bazaars, I made dried flower arrangements. I did a lot. They still tell me they miss my stand which was a beautiful stand, I made things out of pinecones, little baskets with dried flowers, it looked lovely.

Was it important that Belsize Square was a refugee community?

It was very English really. We did never talk German there, we wanted to be English, it was good. One doesn't want to feel left out, you know. Living in England, we want to use the same language, communicate with English people. We got very good friends here, in this close, if you are here still in summer you must come to our street party. I will invite you to the street party if I am still there. And then we have the tables here and the children play in the roundabout there. I started it about 27 years ago now. I started the street party. They come out with something, sandwiches, we tell each other what to bring. I made the lucky dip always. When the Queen had her silver wedding or something, then we started the street parties. We are the only ones that still do it.

Which language did you speak with your husband?

Mostly English. The children wanted to learn English, they learned it at school, not from my husband. Paul didn't want it, he said, that's finished, that's behind us. They understand us.

You didn't want to speak German to the children either?

No, no. Why? They gave us enough vocabulary. As you know, my teacher said, I will never learn it, but I am a nice girl. I think people still hear my accent.

Do they normally ask you?

Oh, yes. Even the minicab drivers.

Does it bother you?

No, not a bit. Then I ask where they come from. [laughs] Oh, no, it doesn't bother me. I think the truth is better to say than anything. Anyway, you can hear it. I went to Köln once again to meet cousins of my husband's who were half Jewish, and his cousin, Hedi looked after him, she found a place for him to stay during the war and visited him. Kochmann in Köln, and Klaus is in Berlin, I am still in touch with all these people. And in America, and in Israel, I have many relatives. But mainly from my husband's side. And then my sister's family in Tel Aviv. They are here sometimes.

To come back to Belsize Square: Was it relevant at all that the other people were refugees?

They nearly all were from the same background as mine. There were a few English people or intermarried with English people. It was mostly refugees, Belsize Square. And now there are the children of us, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Have you met Susie Lyons, the kindergarten teacher, the matron there?

I met her briefly. What about the rabbi when you joined, who was the rabbi?

Salzberger. I knew his wife even better and the children, they got lovely children, they are still connected to the synagogue. We were friendly with the Salzbergers, they invited us for tea sometimes. They were nice people. She belongs to the women's society as well, you know.

Tell me about the women's society.

We had our meetings, and we prepared our bazaars. We had the children's bazaar, the children played with the children, had their own stands for them to buy things and so on. Life goes on, now I am still a member, I don't know why, I never go there because I go with my children now. They go to the Finchley synagogue.

You also belong to Club 43 and the Lodge. How are the different activities linked?

As I say, I have been very active in all of them, I was a treasurer in Club 43. I was active enough, quite a lot of work. My sister was chairman, and in the Lodge, I did a lot of crafty work and table decorations. And in the synagogue as well, the same thing more or less. I made a lot of friends.

What was the main motivation for you to become so involved?

Because I love people and I am very sociable. That's it, that made me do it. And they liked me, I made a lot of friends and still have.

How come you are the only one or one of the few who is both a member of Belsize Square and Club 43?

I can't tell you. I think they are satisfied enough belonging to the synagogue. We didn't get many members from the synagogue. Not at all.

Why not? Can one say maybe that one is more intellectual, more left-wing, politically?

Actually, Club 43 was political. It was communist in the beginning. But I can't tell you why. Hans tried hard and they have the programme out, but we have very few people coming from there. I don't know if our president, Kitty, if she belongs to our synagogue. Kitty and Hans, I don't know, I must find out. I don't know why that is, I think they are satisfied with the synagogue alone and most people are working. But the Club goes on quite well.

So, one can say that the Club 43 represents the cultural aspect and Belsize Square the more religious aspect?

Yes. We have nothing to do with the religion, nothing at all. I don't know anybody else who belongs to the synagogue there.

Today you are more involved in the Club 43?

Yes, as the tea lady. [laughs]

That's quite a position, a powerful position I would say.

The tea lady. In the synagogue I don't do anything anymore. I did to the end, I did the bazaars, and I like to do it. And sometimes when people give me dried flowers, I make bunches and give them to them to take in, but I am not going to have my own stand anymore.

Was your husband involved in the synagogue?

Paul? No, not at all. In the Lodge neither. I think he was asked to be president once, but it wasn't his line somehow. He was very good, he gave lovely lectures, beautiful lectures, his were the best lectures. He lectured in the Lodge, in the synagogue and in the club.

What role did these different organisations play for you in the process of settling in England. Were they important?

I think so. To meet people was important, wasn't it? We both, Paul was in Africa for 16 years, so he didn't make any contact really. So, when we joined the synagogue, he made friends. As I say, the Salzbergers were our friends, they invited us and came here. Connections were important, businesswise, too. Actually, Mr Battsek, who lived in No 11, who had a business, all-trade, textiles and motorcars and so on, and a friend of ours, who we made in Africa, he heard when Paul came back from Africa, he wanted to do some work still. And he said he heard there was a position for textiles in that firm where Mr Battsek works. And so, Paul rang up and had an interview and Mr Battsek said to him, where do you live Mr Friedmann. Paul said in Grey Close, oh, he said, that's where I live. We didn't know each other. [laughs] So he got the job. He took him to the office every morning, he didn't drive a car. Paul took Ruth to school, she went to Camden School for Girls. And we had a position. Then textiles went bad, cotton textile went down to nothing. Mr Battsek then said after years, we are very sorry, but that department has to close down, we can't get the goods anymore. But what we could do, he said, you start your own business, take our connections, the connections you had through us, and we opened an office in Regents Street, Upper Regents Street. I helped as well, I worked with my husband. The children were independent then.

Did you have any contact with English Jews?

First of all, Paul's relatives, they were Jewish and lived here. And then through the children. They made friends with people, here in the suburb. And through the organisations, we met lots of people and as I say, through the children.

Did your children mix with the children of Belsize Square? Was it important for them?

No, I don't think so. Ruth didn't like the lessons at all, she stopped it. And Frank had to do it, because of his Bar Mitzvah. He had Jewish friends, but I think through school.

Can you tell me about his Bar Mitzvah?

Yes, it was here, in the garden. We had a canvas. Kokotek did it.

You knew Kokotek from Hamburg?

No. But he told us at the Bar Mitzvah that he came from Altona, from the same town as we. I knew Carlebach because I did some holiday work with children through that synagogue, but I didn't meet many people, I met the social worker there. What was her name? I forgot.

Did things change when Kokotek took over as a rabbi?

No, I don't think so. I couldn't tell you anymore. I don't know if new ideas came in, and everybody brings their own ideas, you know. After Kokotek it was Mariner. I like Cantor Fine, he is lovely. He came to see me at my birthday, he's lovely.

So, you do still go to the services at BSS?

Not anymore. Since I am alone, since my husband died and another friend with whom I went. He died in 1979, 21 years ago, unfortunately. He was 75 and I was 70. I go with my children to their synagogue, I like it. Especially Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

To come back to the women's society. Somebody told me it was set up because there were very many single women. Is that true?

Die Ehrenwerts. The sisters Ehrenwert. They were not married.

Were there many women who were not married?

They were already widows. There were a few unmarried women, yes. The Ehrenwerts were lovely people. I can't remember that there were many.

What was the aim of the women's society?

It was social. A social club, to meet and they had their own stands at the bazaars. Just social. It was very nice. We met in the morning and met in the synagogue. I don't know who started it. One of the first important women there, Lily Montagu, I think she started it all. I never met her, she wasn't married. I can't tell you more. [laughs]

From your perspective, you have been a member for almost 50 years, can you see any changes?

A lot of younger people joined, I don't know any of them. What can one do? I think that's the change I see when I am going to a lecture, when there is a lecture on art and so on, I like to join, I still do. I don't like to sit at home all the time and do my dolls - I want to sell them now. We have a meeting next Tuesday from the Lodge, a social afternoon, and I can't go, you know why? The stairs are too steep. They were here with me, a fortnight ago, that was lovely, I had ten people around the table.

Is religion important to you, or more the social side?

More social, yes. And to belong to something, that's my aim. I like to belong to a group of people with the same interest, that's all I want really. And that's what I have, I have so many friends, you should have seen my birthday cards, I had over 90 last year.

To belong to people who you have something in common?

Yes. The same interests, that's very important. Art and music, I am very keen on music, all day long I hear music. And go to concerts with Annie, but I have stopped that now because sometimes, not every night, but sometimes at 9 o'clock I get so tired - I can hardly go up the stairs. Last night I was fine, at 11 o'clock I went up and was fine, but I am afraid to go. I go to the Lodge which is late as well, Wednesday it will be 10 o'clock when we come home. The weekend is a busy weekend, you know, eating out and then have the scrabble evening. Do you play scrabble? It's lovely! [laughs] It's a really nice game. Annie and I we are playing a lot, and other people, but next Sunday at the card evening, they make a table for us as well.

I feel disadvantaged playing scrabble in English.

I love it. I think it is a nice game, it keeps your mind fresh, I am adding up, writing down, keeps my brain alive, I think it's very important to do something. And I go to the theatre, nearly every time to the Hampstead Theatre.

You said it's important to belong?

Yes. I am open-minded.

How important for you is the history of the German Jews?

Oh yes, I am very interested in the history of Judaism. And I am interested in Israel. I am not a Zionist, but I have so many relatives there, and I am invited again for a wedding.

Is Belsize Square a bridge to the past somehow?

No. Not really. Not for me. But I love to go to Israel. I have been a few times, but I have never been to a synagogue in Israel, funnily enough. To the mosque, yes.

Have you been back to Germany?

I visited a cousin who was very ill and asked us to come over. And Bertha's relatives, the Schlichtmanns, I visited them. I didn't enjoy it. I mean, I don't like the Germans anymore. They are finished for me, on the whole. But Inge and Otto are very good people, Bertha's husband, he never put his hand up. Bertha was so afraid that he would be taken away. He looked after my parents when they were still there, visited them. And then the Kochmanns in Cologne, we visited, Hedi was not Jewish, but she looked so well after her husband, wonderful. And the two boys, they come here sometimes with their wives, Klaus and Manfred. Last year, or the year before, they rented a flat and invited Ruth, Robert, Oliver and me for lunch there. It was nice to meet their wives, Brigitte I already knew. I like to keep contact with people.

But not with Germany in particular.

No, not at all. No. The further I am away the better. Funnily, Hans [Selig] loves to go there. Goes to Mannheim, gives lectures.

That's why I am asking, many people have very different approaches.

Oh yes. And let them - I don't blame them. If they like it, why not. And he even has to give lectures in his old school or something.

You wouldn't do that.

No. No. I met Vera Weiss, who was a fellow pupil, but she went back to Germany. She lived here and I met somebody who is related to the Kochmanns, she came one day, phoned me up, she married a Jewish man, relative of Kochmann's. And I invited her straight away to come and have dinner here with us and I kept in touch with her, and she died. None of my friends are still alive. My best friend who was the daughter of our house doctor, who was a doctor herself in Israel in Haifa, she died. The daughter of our house doctor in Germany, Dr Müller. I got a lot of my religious knowledge from this family, because I was always invited for Passover and so on. My parents didn't do it. And I met Eva again, when she came here. I met her in Haifa again. They are not anymore. What can I do.

Is there anything else you want to say about Belsize Square? The main thing for you was social?

Yes, I am that kind of person. Yes, not the religion.

What do you want the future of Belsize Square to be?

Oh, they carry on very well with the youngsters, don't they? When I go there, I feel a stranger, my generation is dying out, unfortunately. I mean, if Martin Lorenz would still be there, I suppose he is, his son takes him sometimes. That's the sad part, isn't it? You lose all your friends, I lost three or four friends last year. Margot Williams, who was quite involved in the synagogue, Ulla never has been involved. It's sad. Her daughter gives a party on the 23rd, not a party, a stone setting, but the grave is so far from the chapel.

Did you see in Belsize Square, the just put up a little plaque in commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. Did you see that?

No, I didn't see that. In the hall?

Yes, and there was a big discussion about it.

Really?

The question was how the community should commemorate the Holocaust.

Many people, from my husband's family were killed, so was my mother's sister. My husband has lost quite a lot of people. I knew them all. I knew the children who lived here, who came by Kindertransport. There's a lot to tell, isn't there?

How do you see the future of Club 43?

Not very optimistic. Hans is rather disappointed. I don't think that the lectures were so interesting lately.

Would you like the Club 43 to carry on?

Oh yes. We were 20 again the last time. He just talked about it, he is pessimistic. The thing is, who will carry on? Who will do it? I really don't know any of the people there who could carry on. Actually, I was going to ring Kreisler, who was quite busy with us, but not anymore, he doesn't get on with Hans so well, he is criticising him too much, it's no good. He comes sometimes, but not as regularly as he did. He did the archive, you know.

What is the relationship between people in the Club 43?

They are friends. Yes. It's a nice atmosphere, don't you think?

Oh, yes, I like it. So, Club 43 is the closest to your heart of the all the organisations you were involved with?

The synagogue is not at my heart anymore, because I don't go there anymore. As I say I should really get out, for what am I in there? The Lodge, I am quite close to it, I like our president, but she is leaving in May, Kitty Freud. She will be still there, helping the next president. And I haven't got many connections to the others, the new ones. In Club 43, some of the men I don't know. Robin doesn't come anymore. A few people who came regularly don't come any more. They have got other things to do, I suppose. But as long as he has 14 to 20 people he

can carry on. But who takes over the tea lady? I have the box here, buy the biscuits, but who will do it after me? Sometimes I think I have had enough of it, mustn't tell Hans. Annie and I we will carry on, but poor Annie, she had such a fall yesterday, I get so unhappy about it. She said she slept well because she took so many tablets.

I think if there is nothing else you want to say, we have covered everything.

I think I told you my life in the synagogue, how much I did there. And there are still some appreciating it. Somebody said the other day, that they miss my stones. And I wouldn't mind doing it again if I had the strength. No, I haven't got the strength anymore.

Thank you very much for the interview.

I hope you can make something out of it. I'm looking forward to your lecture in November.