

Character, Personality or Dignitary? Memorable Folk of the Wychwoods

How do you define a character, a personality or even a dignitary? The Oxford English Dictionary is always a good place to start and there you discover that a *Character* is someone with a collection of peculiarities, a sort of style or idiosyncrasy. Well we have plenty of them around to make life interesting. A *Personality* is someone identified by their distinctive character; yes we've had a sprinkling of them, if the stories in *The Wychwood* archives are to be believed, and a *Dignitary* is a holder of high office and we have been blessed with a few of them!



Ascott Parish Council. Terry Souch, who was co-opted onto Shipton Parish Council in 1962, continued to serve until his untimely death in 1987. The record for service must surely go to John Miller, who spent 41 years on the Management Committee of Milton Village Hall, 30 of those years as Chairman!

Drop-ins

Personalities can be split into two groups, folk of distinctive character who contribute to village life and *Celebrities* (famous or widely-known persons) who have passed through. Aneka Rice and the Duchess of York both 'dropped in' by helicopter in the 1980s - causing much excitement, though I suspect that

Parliamentary Pantomime?

Well, let's deal with the dignitaries first and local MPs must be high on the list. Douglas Hurd was our local MP and, despite holding high office in Margaret Thatcher's government, still found time to read a copy of *The Wychwood* back in 1992. He must be the only MP to conduct a constituency surgery on stage in the midst of the scenery and props of the WI pantomime! Local councillors are a group of people who are very committed to the needs of the villages, as their individual service records confirm. Dr Margaret Ware served as District Councillor for 14 years, retiring in 1990. Reginald Montgomery was Chairman of Milton Parish Council for 18 years, while in 1994 Harry Cook celebrated his 80th birthday and 20 years as Chairman of

Aneka's use of the Shaven Crown as part of her TV series *Treasure Hunt* made the biggest impression on us. Christopher Fry lived with his wife Phyl and son Tam at Hill Buildings, Shipton and wrote many of his best works during that period. Richard Briers used his cottage in Fiddlers Hill as a 'bolt hole' back in the 1970s and many Ascott folk will remember Pam Ayres and John Hurt as neighbours.

The famous 'Mitford Girls' also made their mark on Shipton, with Deborah, the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire recalling her childhood memories of taking eggs from her home in Swinbrook to Shipton Station for onward delivery to London. As she passed the Shaven Crown in her pony and trap could she ever have imagined that her sister Diana and brother-in-law, Oswald

Mosley, would be imprisoned there during the Second World War?

Quietly Outstanding

Perhaps more interesting still are the villagers who have quietly got on with their lives, probably not even thinking that they were 'serving' their community in any special way. Two women stand out and their efforts were recognised when they were awarded MBEs, Daphne Edginton and Vi Miles. Whilst working alongside her husband on the farm, Daphne raised her family and cared for POW and other farm-workers. After 'retiring' she turned her attention and energy to supporting the Red Cross, the Blind Club, Chipping Norton Hospital, St John Ambulance Brigade and Milton WI. Vi, known as 'Aunty Vi' to all, rose above her austere childhood, spent in children's homes, and never refused help to anyone in need; her fundraising was legendary, she always had a smile on her face and a cheery word for all. Just before she died she is remembered saying that she had "loved every minute of her life."

Dr Gordon Scott Senior. arrived in the Wychwoods in 1936 and set about improving the medical care and the general welfare of the villages. During the war years he organised meals for evacuees and troops, encouraged fundraising, improved housing for the elderly, started the Nightwatchers Scheme to help care for the terminally ill, and provided surgeries with dispensaries in Ascott, Milton and Shipton, laying the foundations for the high standard of medical care that we all receive today.



Col. Stedall spent 40 years in Shipton, until his death in 1989, and was involved in many village activities. He was a great benefactor to Shipton; the village green as we know it today was his gift in memory of his first wife, Catherine. He was also co-founder of *The Wychwood*.

Local Colour

So that leaves the *Characters* who have enriched our lives with their style, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies! They bring colour to life and many interesting stories have found their way onto our pages. Many villagers will remember Eddie Townsend riding his bike between Shipton and Milton and joining in any gathering at the village halls in search

of his tea. How many remember that he was a war hero who, despite being badly injured, managed to repair the radio and summon aid for his stricken Hudson plane of Coastal Command? Albert Watton and Frank Viner were inseparable as they grew up together in the 1930s and in death were laid together in Shipton Cemetery.

One 'character' who stands above all was PC Stan Hicks, the last of the true village bobbies. He was not averse to handing out a 'clip round the ear' for minor offences, thus keeping the youth of the day in line; he was held in high esteem, especially by many of those youths on the receiving end of those 'clips'.

Will you be one of the characters, personalities or dignitaries to grace our pages in the next 30 years?