

Past and Present

In Past and Present we profile a villager from the Wychwoods and the person they nominate who has contributed to the life of the local villages in the past.

The first house Margaret and Frank owned was Fuchsia Cottage in Milton's High Street but when, in 1965, Margaret produced the Wychwoods' first set of twins for many years (according to Dr Gordon Scott), they 'emigrated' to Shipton to a larger house which they named 'Monks Gate', opposite the village green and stores, where they still live. Margaret co-founded the Wychwood Playgroup in 1968, and later chaired a fund-raising committee which built the learner swimming pool at the Wychwood School.

Special interests

Margaret served as secretary to the Wychwood School managers, as a member of Shipton Parish Council and, in 1976, was elected as Independent District Councillor for Shipton and Ascott (and Lyneham), a position she held through four elections for fourteen years.

Her special interests were in housing and planning matters, but she was chairman of the District's Recreation Committee for many years, concerned among other matters with public rights-of-way, and encouraging the introduction of the Council's tourism policy.

Margaret was elected Vice-Chairman of West Oxfordshire District Council in 1986 and served a number of



Dr. Margaret Ware

years as a Burford School governor.

She made time in 1981 to found the Wychwoods Local History Society, convinced that many fascinating papers, deeds and memories of ordinary peoples' lives deserved to be recorded and the history of the area researched.

Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated band of like-minded people, the

Society has enjoyed twenty-two years of vigorous existence, publishing a Journal every year since 1985, to which Margaret has both contributed and edited.

Archaeology

Since retiring from the District Council in 1990 she has devoted more time to archaeology; both she and Frank are non-executive directors of a large commercial archaeological contractor in Oxford. They are also largely responsible for the History Society's archaeological activities, running successful annual fieldwalks and mounting exhibitions. More recently, both Margaret and Frank took an active part in fund-raising for the New Beaconsfield Hall. Margaret now has the leisure to be an ordinary member of Shipton WI and the Wychwood Players, playing minor roles; she enjoys giving talks to various organisations, relishes being a grandmother, but still finds too little time to paint her watercolours.

Past and Present

When we first lived in Shipton, Mrs Wiggins, together with her sister, Miss Jessica Coombes, ran the post office in Church Street, while her husband George sat in the corner behind the counter, quietly mending clocks and watches.

It was Mrs Wiggins who first kindled my interest in local history. She represented a little bit of history herself, as Shipton post office had been in the hands of the same family for four generations. Not only that, it is mentioned in the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest sub-post office in England, and certainly the oldest surviving one.

Letters

The claim was based on letters written to her great-grandfather, Richard Cross on April 4, 1845 clearly addressed to him at 'Post Office, Shipton, Chipping Norton, Oxford', although Shipton was not issued with its date stamp until July 1847. He was



**Mrs.
Kitty
Wiggins**

also parish clerk and overseer, as well as being in business as a weaver.

Kitty Wiggins took over the running of the post office from her mother in 1930 and only retired in 1974. She told me that she had a life-long interest in Shipton's history, and had carefully preserved papers and a few objects from the past, some of which were given to me after her death in the late 1970's. Some of these are on permanent loan to the Oxfordshire County Museum and others are in the archives of the History Society.

I am sure it was this fascinating link backwards into Shipton's past which spurred me on to found our History Society, and I like to hope that its achievements over the last twenty-two years would have met with Mrs Wiggins' approval.

Dr. Margaret Ware

Wychwood Local History Society

The Wychwoods Local History Society is nearing the end of the 2002/3 season of monthly meetings. The new season begins on 18th September, at Milton when Russell Cherry will talk on 'The Thames from its Source to Oxford. Annual subscriptions, £8 for a couple or £5 for an individual become due at this time. Membership includes a free copy of the Society's latest Wychwoods History.

This latest edition, number 18, is

now available and contains articles on the first 21 years of the WLHS; properties in Shipton in 1911; local casualties in Mesopotamia in the First World War; the history of Chesnut Close, Ascott (now called Wychwood Manor) and part two of the Hartley Heritage.

