

Special Feature

How We Came to the Wychwoods

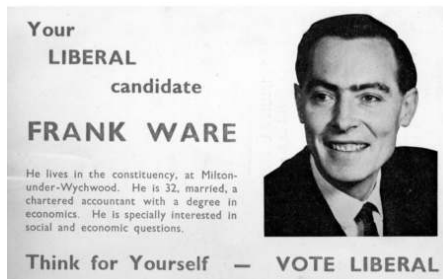
In 1962 the North Oxfordshire Liberal Association was looking for a new parliamentary candidate. Lawrence Robson of Kiddington Hall had a young articled clerk in his London firm of Chartered Accountants, Blackburn Robson Coates, by the name of Frank Ware. Before being articled, Frank had worked for the Liberal MPs under Jo Grimond, and he was now looking for his own constituency.

Frank's Constituency

Introductions and interviews (with both of us) were arranged and Frank was duly adopted as the Liberal Prospective Candidate for North Oxfordshire. The constituency then was enormous, comprising half the county stretching from Banbury to the Thames and Chipping Norton to Kidlington. Living in London, we could not hope to 'nurse' it adequately without a local base, so we started house-hunting. We finally bought 300-year old 'Fuchsia Cottage' in High Street, Milton and came down at weekends to meet local people, canvass, deliver leaflets, address meetings and get to know the terrain. We pounded endless streets, we ran stalls in fund-raising Christmas Fayres and I opened several fetes, including one in the garden of Richard Early's house in New Yatt Road, Witney, now part of the District Council's offices. In 1963 we moved to Milton permanently.

For over a year Harold MacMillan was reluctant to go to the country because of the Profumo scandal, but the general election was finally called for October 1964. Political activity immediately hotted up. Frank toured the constituency with a loudspeaker, giving the same speech over and over again, often to one or two bemused villagers and a herd of cows. He spoke at three meetings a night in a variety of halls, huts, club rooms and shelters. I challenged the wife of Neil Marten (the sitting

Conservative member) to a public debate on women's issues, she declined.



Break a Leg!

After cracking his elbow on the steps of Chadlington Village Hall in the dark, Frank achieved the Oxford Mail's front page - *Liberal Candidate Breaks Arm*. Polling Day was enlivened in Milton by Patrick Rawlins' display of Liberal posters on every post and pole! Frank came third, as expected, but saved his deposit (no mean feat in those days) and we had 'flown the flag' for the party. When our twin daughters were born a year later, our lovely little cottage suddenly seemed too small. We found a run-down empty house in Shipton, which we did not altogether like at first, but it was spacious and it would 'do' until we found something better. Forty years later we are still here!

Margaret Ware