

Caroline Dalton:

Caroline, how long have you been involved with the parish council?

I think it's 1974, but I can't remember; I would have to look up in the book where we sign up in the office. It might be 1973. Yes, quite a long time now, but I haven't exceeded the record of some of our retired members, one of whom was a councillor for over 30 years - Fred Anson

He must have liked it.

Yes, I think he was very keen.

What kinds of things have you been involved in during that time?

Well, round here I am chiefly noted for a mania about trees, and I first got involved with this after Dutch Elm Disease removed so many of the well-loved and familiar mature trees from our environment, and I was responsible for getting people to plant more trees in and around the village, and they are now quite sizeable specimens, in spite of very pessimistic forecasts from a lot of people about how they would be vandalised and about how they would never grow and how it wouldn't rain enough, and so forth.

What kind of trees are they?

They are English native hardwood species of tree like beeches, oaks, maples and that kind of thing.

That's terrific!

Well, it's getting more and more interesting now, and the parish council is hoping to do a follow-up programme this year, because it's about 10 or 11 years since we started doing the initial planting, and it's now time to see our mistakes and what are the gaps we need to fill in.

I would think it took a lot of organising on your part

It was a bit difficult, because I found that my main competitor for getting people out of bed to do things during the tree planting season, which as you know, is during the unpleasant part of the year, from October to March, was TV sport on Saturday afternoon, especially International Rugby matches.

This would involve a lot of the men, I suppose?

Yes, that's right; there were women and children and teenagers involved too, but if women were involved, they couldn't leave their children to riot round the house while the men were watching sport, so you tended to find you were caught, whoever was coming.

But you got there in the end?

Oh, yes we did, and after a time we discovered it wasn't necessary to put barbed wire and entanglements round each tree and it became much quicker and more pleasant, 'cos most

people don't mind planting a tree and knocking in a stake, but when it involves putting a military entanglement, it becomes much more difficult.

It must have been quite physically demanding, I should think?

Yes it was, but one was always spurred on by very nice people dashing out with cups of tea - that sort of thing

What kind of a place is Wheatley to live in?

Well, I'd say it's very interesting really; it's got a highly mixed population and by mixed I mean of all ages and of all social classes and I think the original inhabitants do quite understand that they get this feeling they are swamped and submerged, but at the same time, there's a vigorous local life - there's a Festival every year and there's an amenities society and there's an enormous variety of things going on; if you look in our guide to the village, the Parish Council brought out about 18 months ago, you can see there's practically everything you could want from cradle to the grave in the way of clubs - not just sports or just WEA but a real terrific mixture, and it was difficult to bring out this information booklet because all the time the Parish Clerk was assembling the information, it was rapidly going out of date as more and more things kept proliferating

How many people live here, approximately?

Well, I think the Parish Clerk could tell you right up to the last digit, but I think its close on 4,000 at the moment

So it's a big village, then?

It is, but while we are obviously not one of these picturesque, cosy places, like Broadway, immediately springs to mind, at the same time, we are tremendously lucky in that we have a large number of shops and services actually available to us in the village

I suppose also you have a certain amount of traffic problems?

Yes, we do indeed, and one of the very difficult problems that face the Parish Council is that of making sure that anything we suggest doesn't just shift the main burden to somewhere else in the village because you tend to find that by improving things in one area, you are making another crossroads or another corner absolutely horrendous for the people who live there. It's a bit of a losing battle in a way, because I'm afraid the subject of cars and people is one fraught with problems - everybody wants to do the things that they don't want other people to do to them

And when you are not organising people into planting trees, what do you do?

You make me sound frightfully bossy, but actually I work in Oxford - I work at New College, I'm the assistant archivist there, so I deal with things that are very firmly in the past, and though I'm organising people, they're all dead! So I'm responsible for the care and custody of the

archives and for showing them to researchers and guiding researchers about where they might look in these quite large and complicated archives for different kinds of historical material

Are you a historian?

I have got a degree in history; I wouldn't claim to be a historian

So really, your profession isn't totally unrelated to your interest in conservation?

No, that's right. I have always had this very primitive worry that everything we do on this side of the world is tied up globally with what other people are doing and I am very worried that in the rest of the world, forests are falling faster than they ever have before, and so I do think it's very important to have trees somewhere even if only to be able to breathe in a few decades time when all the rest of the trees have gone.