

2771 A personal remembrance of the Wheatley Society - Charles Brock February 2, 2014

Gosh, I can't believe 40 years have gone by. It all started when a bunch of us watched historic cottages being torn down. Specifically the three charming 17th century cottages on Crown Square were suddenly gone, and to my knowledge the public were not consulted. Perhaps the Parish Council had some knowledge of that act of barbarism, and maybe there were some notices put around the Square, but I don't recall seeing them. That was the start of it all.

We had a big meeting in the Merry Bells and quickly decided to form a society. Jon Drake was elected Chair, and somehow I was elected Treasurer. That was a great mistake — it took our auditor the bank manager two years to find the penny and the half-penny mistakes I made. I think the totals came to a hundred pounds or so. I can't remember who the other officers were but we had meaningful and fun committee meetings. We always went to the pub afterwards. I remember that all right.

Two important things then happened. We swept the Parish Council elections and started to challenge the tear-downs in the village. We loaded the committee that approved housing changes and tried to keep the village looking good.

And we had some riotous parties. Our summer party was often at the old farm on Crown Road and it went on until early in the morning. Fortunately I only lived across the street, but even then I had trouble finding the way home. We had summer parties at the Drakes as well when we acted out some of Jon's reconstructed medieval pagan rites. That was strange stuff.

We had Christmas Parties at the White Hart which I now understand was once owned by John Milton, though he never pulled pints. I don't think our skits and poems quite lived up to his legacy, but at least we didn't know he was landlord. Good thing too.

There were a few problems with relations between new and old village, and sometimes it seemed the Society was mainly newcomers who wanted to keep the village as a place of old England but the older members wanted the tear-downs. Pat Jeffs was instrumental in helping bridge that gap. So was Bruce Shepherd, who was Parish Council Chair for a few years, though he rather favored the older ways.

The Society was a fundamental way for newcomers to become part of the village, and people who were there for yonks didn't much care about it save for a few, but they were crucial for us new people. It was a time of national social upheaval and class breakdowns, and I was glad to be part of that.

And thanks for all those good times!

Charles Brock - resident from 1963 to 1998; minister of the United Reformed Church, Fellow and Chaplain of Mansfield College, Oxford