

Proposer's Presentation for Mrs Margaret Simmons on the occasion of her receiving the 2016 Honorary Townsman Award from Wem Town Council

It was back in late May 2015, at the Annual meeting of our Wem Town Council that we considered whether there were any suitable nominations for 'The Honorary Townsman's Award', the highest honour that can be bestowed by our town... (Knighthoods, Peerages may follow in due course when we have declared ourselves an independent state!... anything Scotland has tried to do... or we are working towards as a United Kingdom with regard to matters concerning the European Union following our Referendum decision, etc... we could emulate!). To be serious... ..we have gathered here tonight for a special purpose, that of acknowledging that we have amongst us someone here in Wem who the Town Council wishes to honour and record their name as an Honorary Townsman for posterity on the Town's Board for this purpose, files and archives. As such they will become part of a very special and select group of people that none of us as current Town Councillors, who may be here today and gone tomorrow, are amongst. Anyway, it was at our Annual Meeting in May 2015... after the election of Mayor, Deputy Mayor and all other positions on Committees for the forthcoming Civic Year had been agreed, that the next item on the Agenda asks us to consider if there are any suitable nominations for 'The Honorary Townsman's Award'. The speed at which this comes up at this meeting has caught me out year after year... because this is an important matter and needs serious consideration! If no suitable nominations are received at this meeting the matter is not discussed for another year. We as Councillors feel such an honour is so important that we simply do not award it if suitable names are not raised for discussion. Well that was 2015 and I simply missed my opportunity of proposing for discussion someone who I consider worthy of inclusion. However I then set to thinking seriously about this issue as I went about town for the next year. Consequently I made sure that the name of the person who we are here to honour tonight was set before the Council in May 2016... ..and I'm delighted to say that of all the names considered on this occasion it was the name of Mrs Margaret Simmons that my fellow Town Councillors agreed upon as the vote was taken. So this is not my decision Margaret, it is that of the whole Town Council. It is the Town Council who expressed a wish to give you this Award and we are delighted that you have agreed to accept it. We trust this special evening of presentation is a most memorable one for you, as it is for Wem Town Council.

Mrs Margaret Simmons, or simply Margaret to many of us... has been a lively part of our town life for many years! Although many of you here tonight will probably have known Margaret for more years than I, it falls to me as the Proposer of this Award (a dubious custom the Town Council seem to have developed... when so many are in agreement with me and could have had this privilege!), to briefly explain why we have decided to accord this honour to Margaret.

I first began to get to hear of Margaret as my children joined the newly formed Stage Door Theatre, and its Youth section. Mr John Roberts and his team were simply fizzing with energy and ideas for revamping the old Apostolic Chapel as a theatrical home for themselves. Margaret, Nancy Wilson, Jessel, Jenny and so many others were just willing this project to succeed. The Wemian has since carried numerous articles detailing the development of WADOS from its inception in the time of Miss Ohm all written by Margaret... with care to report accurately all that happened and note the names of so many who were part of the different productions over the years. Anyone reading cannot help be impressed by the passion and fervour behind the pen! At the same time, Margaret had a 'Health and Fitness' business to run with her husband that was run with equal care and enthusiasm for all things healthy

and fitness related. This brought her into contact with so many Wemians, for whom fitness and health were not exactly high on their list of priorities! Such was her motivating power people came, and then began to attend regularly. Consequently the health and lives of many in the town has benefitted...many moving into the town in their retirement and finding such a warm welcome awaiting them that they returned again and again. However this is not all, Margaret, like so many others, was contending with all the highs and lows of family life ...not least caring for an aging mother who lived at a considerable distance from Wem. Many a lesser person would have given up the social things she was doing, to do the core things needed on the home front. There are so many other things one could add of Margaret's involvement in Wem life in other areas but I'll leave these for Margaret to tell you about later on tonight. However can I just be allowed one more recollection of Margaret that shows another angle on this special Wemian we are about to honour tonight?

Margaret is the educational 'bi-product' of the famous, dare I say infamous, 'Grove School' that was here in Wem at that time under the leadership of Miss Freeman. It was decided that her daughter should enrol there. As a parent, interested in the welfare of her daughter during these 'educational years', Margaret must have indirectly learnt so much from her school 'encounters' because I once saw her in a production put on by WADOS in the newly reconstructed Town Hall called 'Evacuees'. I enjoyed it immensely as it sought to both educate and entertain those much younger, like myself, who had not had been alive during the Second World War. Margaret played the part of a Headteacher.....and she did it magnificently. When I saw her later I commented on her role and the way she interpreted it she referred me straight back to Miss Freeman and her daughter's days at The Grove. My, she must have been some Headteacher - fearsome, unpredictable and unforgettable to all who knew her....so many stories coming from all who had 'first hand' experience of her! Margaret used her 'Grove experiences' that night as she taught me a lot about Miss Freeman. Her parenting experiences resulting from her daughter's education in the establishment simply poured out of her... and I think this shows her very good acting ability too. She is able to inspire so well because she is so human. She hasn't let the tough lessons of life break her but instead learnt from them and put them to good effect in leading and encouraging all those around her in our wonderful little town of Wem. She has done us all a great service and we thank her most sincerely for all her efforts for us all. May they long continue and 'thank you' Margaret.

As I have already said, the main purpose of our gathering tonight is to present Margaret with her Honorary Townsman's Award. Before we do so it is perhaps appropriate that I now say what this highest honour in the Town council's gift is about. The title of 'Honorary Townsman' was created so:

'that Town and Parish Councils may bestow it on those who have given notable service to the community or who have achieved something note-worthy or spectacular'

In 1983 Wem Town Council began to award this title and to date 48 have been given. This now includes Mrs Margaret Simmons as from June 2016 when the Town Council voted to extend this honour to her because, as I have outlined, she has given much notable service to our town in a number of ways over many years...and these achievements fully meet the criteria set out for this award.

To quote from our Press Release we said:

‘This honour is being given to Mrs Simmons in recognition of her many years positively promoting the best interest of Wem and Wemians and in particular the sterling work she has done in ensuring the ongoing success of the Wem Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society. Amongst other achievements, both as a life-long member and now as its President, Mrs Simmons has played a key role in the WADOS team to collectively enable the purchase of its own theatre in Aston Street as well as foster the development of a very strong and successful youth section that is doing much to ensure WADOS will continue to flourish into the future’.

It was therefore with great pleasure that Wem Town Council learned that Margaret agreed to accept the honour being made an Honorary Townsman of Wem.....and the reason for tonight’s special evening together.

Consequently Margaret I am delighted to invite you and our Mayor Councillor Mrs Rosemary Dodd to come forward so that you can now formally receive your Honorary Townsman’s Award with our thanks for your long and note-worthy service to our community here in Wem. Long may it continue! ...and tonight we all here offer you our heartiest ‘Congratulations’ as you do so.

Councillor Edward Towers

14th October 2016