

Proposer's Presentations for Mr Rod Owens and Mr Roger Ashton on the occasion of their receiving the Honorary Townsman Awards from Wem Town Council

Introduction

Each year since 1983 at the Annual meeting of Wem Town Council, that takes place towards the end of May, the Councillors have the opportunity to undertake one of their more enjoyable duties on behalf of all in Wem, that of considering whether they can make suitable nominations for 'The Honorary Townsman's Award'. This is the highest honour that can be conferred by them and is not undertaken lightly. 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 noteworthy or spectacular'

It is only given to someone who the Town Council wishes to honour in this way and then record their name for posterity on the Town's Honours Board for this purpose, and on the town's files and archives as an 'Honorary Townsman'. As such they will become part of a very special and select group of people. You will therefore understand that 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 because something of the high value placed on the Award is then shown by it's being a limited and special honour, given to no more than two people in any one Civic year. We as Councillors feel such an honour is so important that it is simply not given if no suitable names are put forward.

Presentation of Mr Rod Owens

In my time on Wem Town Council I have met some really worthy people in Wem who have given great service to us all in the town and so now reflect long and hard about who I would like to propose for this honour when it come up for discussion each May. This year I felt it important to put before the Town Council the name of Mr Rod Owens. He is someone who I feel we in Wem owe so much to because his has been a life of great and selfless service to our community, and I felt we needed him to know how much we appreciate all he has done and, I'm glad to say, continues to do for us all. Rod is by nature a very quiet and self-effacing man and it has taken me a good number of years for me to even begin to get to know a little about him. My first recollection of Rod is from wife who used to come home after a busy working day at NSDC/Edinburgh House and tell me of a certain helpful Solicitor there who assisted their Environmental Health Team in the deliberations as to whether or not some issue should be prosecuted or not! When I later got to know Rod for myself years later I came to realise that here was a person who more than met the criteria we have as a Town Council for making this award and which then led me to propose his name to my fellow Councillors. Perhaps it would help all present if I were to throw a little more light on Rod and tell you some of the things I have discovered about this very unassuming man and why I felt he should be one of Wem's Honorary Townsmen.

Rod was born in Longton, Stoke-on-Trent (at a very early age!) and then lived most of his formative years at Woolstanton. When old enough (12-16) he went to Boarding School at Alton, near Alton Towers. At 18 years old he was 'articled' to a firm of solicitors in Longton and studied for Law exams at Guildford School of Law. When qualified Rod then worked in private practices in Stoke and then Shrewsbury before becoming the first Solicitor for NSDC in 1974.

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He married Alyson in 1973 and they set up home at Market Drayton. After the birth of their daughter in 1975 they moved as a family to Summerfield Road where they have lived ever since.

His first job at NSDC was to organise the General Election in the north of the county that was called in October 1974, something about which he knew absolutely nothing – but he quickly learned! He has subsequently now presided over 7 elections. (Q Are you the one responsible for the results?)

His job included many difficult facets, but was especially involved him giving advice to the Council on planning laws. Over the years he has been Secretary to the Council, Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Legal and Administrative Services.

Despite sometimes long hours and attending many evening meetings, Rod has also been committed to the community of Wem. He joined Round Table and was involved in many activities raising money for charity, as well as having fun along the way. He was a keen Amateur Dramatist in Newcastle but found the travelling there too tiring, so eventually joined Clive Players, particularly relishing acting in the Pantomime each Christmas where he often had to dress up as a women! Something my researches indicate you seem to have done many times!! I can recall taking my own young family to see Cinderella at Clive Village Hall and being amazed by the goings-on of Rod and our Dr Maurice Lowe (of moustache fame!) as the two ugly sisters!! (can you still remember the lines Rod?).....and who can forget your performances with a certain other as Hinge and Bracket!!

As your two children grew up in Wem and went to local schools Rod, you also then became involved with the PTA of both St Peter's and then Thomas Adams School as well as became a Governor at Trench Hall School, now called The Woodlands, becoming the Chairman there for many years.

Since moving to Wem over 40 years ago, Rod has been a member of Wem Methodist Church, holding a number of posts there amongst which was helping the Church to find the funding for their most recent extension. He has always enjoyed rambling, particularly hill walking and did this regularly with colleagues from NSDC and now with Wem Walkers and the fairly newly established U3A in the town.

Since retiring 11 years ago Rod has used his extra time to become involved with more organisations:

- He is now Chairman of the Robert Hill Trust
- He is the Secretary for the Millenium Green Trust and can often be found gardening there! (Rod also volunteers once a week for Attingham Park)
- He is also the Treasurer for the small Wem charity 'Small Steps Forward' which has built and is supporting a small orphanage in Miriu, Kenya. He is an active fundraiser for Christian Aid week

However, his over-riding passion has been Wem Town Hall. When the previous Town Hall burned down in 1995 he was determined that, against much opposition, it would be rebuilt. From the start he wanted it to be an asset for the community! He was still working at NSDC when it was rebuilt and this involved many meetings with planners, architects and Councillors, etc. After it was rebuilt there were problems and it was closed by NSDC, only being used for the weekly market – remember those days?! After emergency meetings and various questionnaires and consultations the Wem Community Trust was formed and which then in partnership with Thomas Adams School the Town Hall was refurbished and reopened. Rod was a driving force in creating Wem Town Hall Community Trust and was a

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key campaigner to save the building for the community. He has been involved with the Trust almost from the start, and been its Chairman since 2013/2014. Under his leadership we have navigated the changes of moving from a partnership with Thomas Adams School to the Trust taking sole responsibility for the running of Wem Town Hall.

People who have worked with him at the Town Hall under his wise leadership have said:

'Rod Owens is one of the most kind hearted, understanding persons you could ever hope to meet. He has such a busy life with his local commitments and grandfather duties but if you have a problem he always has time for you'.

'Rod goes above and beyond in his support of Wem Town Hall. In addition to his Chairman duties he is a regular part of the volunteer team and in lots of different capacities – he helps with event set ups (lugging tables, chairs and our seating rake), duty manages the building so we can be open extra hours, is a projectionist for the films and ushers at events. He's even helped behind the bar at Mayor's Ball or two!'

'Rod would be an excellent candidate for an Honorary Townsman's Award and I hope my comments will go some way to recommending him'.

As I said in the Town Council's Press release when we announced there would be some Honorary Townsman's Awards made this year.....'***Rod's involvement at Wem Town Hall has seen many positive changes that have now resulted in the formation of an excellent team of both staff and many volunteers. As a result Wem Town Hall is now well placed for a sustainable future serving the inhabitants of the town and north Shropshire with its vibrant, innovative and varied programming that offers a range of opportunities for quality entertainment for all ages to help sustain it financially. This is in addition to being able to offer a fresh modern venue with the latest facilities for meetings, celebrations and education. Under Rod's leadership and because of his many hours of hard work for Wem Town Hall, this facility is now enjoying an increasingly good reputation across both Shropshire and the country at large; for this the Town owes him a great debt of lasting gratitude.'***

This then is a little of this special man we have with us tonight. I'm delighted to say that my fellow Town Councillors voted in favour of my proposal that Mr Rod Owens should be made an Honorary Townsman of Wem. So this is not my decision Rod, 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.

It was therefore with great pleasure that Wem Town Council learned that Rod agreed to accept the honour of being made an Honorary Townsman of Wem.....and one of two reasons for tonight's special evening together!

Consequently Rod I am delighted to invite you to come forward so that you can now formally receive your Honorary Townsman's Award with our thanks for your long and noteworthy service in our community here in Wem. Long may it continue! ...and tonight we all here offer you our heartiest 'Congratulations' as you do so.

Mr Rod Owens please come forward.....

Councillor Edward Towers
24th November 2017

Presentation of Mr Roger Ashton

Roger Ashton is a worthy person to receive the Honorary Townsperson award. He is a member of numerous charitable committees in Wem. He is also an advisory to Wem Young Farmers and National Farmers Union in the Wem area.

Roger is a member of The Rotary Club of Wem and District. At Christmas the annual Rotary Santa sleigh run is amazingly managed by Roger. The sleigh run involves gathering a group of helpers plus a Santa and travelling, for several evenings around Wem giving lots of enjoyment and cheer to children (and grown-ups) at Christmas. All monies raised go to local charities.

The Rotary tree of light is also organised by Roger – A Christmas tree is erected on the Jubilee Square in Wem. Those who would like to remember a loved one at Christmas can pay to put a message on the tree. All monies raised go to charity. His role on the Community committee in Rotary sees him care for elderly people on their own, Roger helps deliver Christmas day meals and he organizes day trips on the canal and trips to the theatre.

Roger sings with the Community choir in Wem and also the St Peter's and St Paul's Parish Church choir. He writes an article for 'The Wemian' called 'Brock' which, I believe, he has been doing for 50 years! It is about rural life and he tells some wonderful true life Countryside stories from his experiences in this area.

I would like to thank Roger for all voluntary work he performs in Wem and congratulate him on his award.

Mr Roger Ashton please come forward..... so that you can now formally receive your Honorary Townsman's Award with our thanks for your long and note-worthy service in our community here in Wem. Long may it continue!

Councillor Peter Broomhall
24th November 2017