

Sheila Pargeter's speech to unveil the Festival Bench

29th July 2023

Wolvercote and Wytham Midsummer Festival 20th anniversary bench

In 2000 Carl in the Post Box shop, my husband Fred and myself wondered how we could best celebrate the new century involving residents of Wolvercote in an appreciation of our village, its activities and its community. This proved difficult at the time, but in 2002 we decided to hold a village wide picnic on Goose Green in honour of the Queen's Jubilee. This was very successful and brought together musicians, fun and games and a BBQ.

Emboldened by this venture and with additional members of the community like Robin and Teresa Lipsey, Gordon Richardson, Jo Malden and other supporters joining us we launched our first Festival in 2003 over a weekend in June. Our intention was to involve as many residents and friends in a variety of events to celebrate the village and showcase its many clubs and societies, concerts, art and craft, dancing, including guest appearances by the Oxford City Morris side where Fred was a member (possibly the inspiration for the Wolvercote's own Morris side). The Wolvercote Horticultural Summer Show (Rose and Sweet Pea) was also an annual contributing factor.

This proved to be a success and, as others joined us, the festival became an annual event and grew in size and scope to last a full week in the life of the village. The committee welcomed others to contribute in many ways to the programme, with ingenuity of contributors, the generosity of sponsors and the support of St Peter's and the Baptist Church the festival blossomed. Then 10 years ago with the enlargement of the benefice we included Wytham and All Saints Church now provided a venue for spectacular concerts and until recently a high standard art and craft show, which it is hoped will be reinstated before too long.

I think we can safely say that our original purpose has been amply fulfilled and we all know far more about our villages and communities.

I would like to thank all the committee members, helpers and volunteers who have brought us to this 20th anniversary and this bench. I hope it will remind us of all the achievements past and spur on the continuation of the Festival to come.

Sheila Pargeter