

DERRICK COMLEY – AN APPRECIATION

It was sad news indeed when, in mid-September, it became known that Derrick Comley might be moving away from Thorncombe. What was far more shattering was his untimely death in hospital on 24 October following a short illness. Those of us who attended his funeral at Yeovil Crematorium were greatly moved by the beautiful and inspirational tributes paid to him by his family and friends.

Derrick came to Thorncombe in 1981 after taking early retirement from his career in electronics. He was not a stranger to the West Country having spent several holidays down here during his working years. It was reassuring to see that Turnpike Cottage, one of the village's distinctive properties which had lain in the doldrums for several years, had clearly landed in sympathetic hands. Apart from undertaking the introduction of modern facilities to the cottage and later its tasteful extension into a viable dwelling, Derrick soon became known as a great walker. He enjoyed exploring the area on foot, becoming familiar with every highway, byway and footpath within a ten-mile radius. On one occasion he even walked across country via Lambert's Castle to Charmouth – and back!

His walks brought him into contact with many of the parish's residents. In this way he came to have a very extensive knowledge of local life – and he was much concerned when, in the mid-'80s, it transpired that the Dorset village he loved so dearly appeared to be threatened by ill-considered overdevelopment. It was this concern which led to the foundation of the Village Trust with Derrick, Augusta Greenlees, John Whitbread and the late Ron Hawkes forming the nucleus. For the next twelve years Derrick, with great energy and determination, happily flung himself into this 'crusade'. Indeed, it is largely due to his work in the community that the vigorous policies recently pursued by the Parish Council, leading to the well-supported protest actions, have culminated in the curbing of some of the excesses of the local Planning Authority. It was also Derrick's desire that the Trust should concern itself not only with the conservation of the village and its community but also with the wider education of the residents regarding the area's rich natural

assets. His totally altruistic efforts to safeguard both the community and its outstandingly beautiful surroundings will be sorely missed.

Born in 1925, Derrick was a native of Warwickshire. He and Hazel married in 1951 and raised three delightful daughters – Gillian, Amanda and Christine. There are five grandchildren. Derrick was highly respected in the television development industry and, until he retired due to failing eyesight, was in charge of GEC's Component Testing Laboratory at Slough, being responsible for accepting or rejecting the components used in GEC television sets. But electronics was only one of the many subjects in which he took a profound technical and practical interest. Among his hobbies were radios, metalwork, cars and building. He became a fine carver of wood – and it was entirely appropriate that his love of trees should have led to his appointment as Thorncombe's Parish Tree Warden and to his pioneer work within the Trust which secured the planting of over 400 trees in an area where losses through hurricanes, diseases and grubbing had been severe. Active to the end, Derrick could often be seen in shirtsleeves with other Trust members, digging planting holes for new oaks, ashes, chestnuts and other arboreal species.

His favourite trees were beeches. The Trust hopes to plant a pair of beech trees, together with a commemorative plaque, on a bank near Turnpike Cottage as a living memorial to the 'Friend of the Trees', Derrick Comley, who cared so much about our environment and who will be remembered by us all with sincere gratitude and affection.

PM

"He that plants trees loves others besides himself"

Thomas Fuller 1732