

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report

April 2022

At North end of Kidlington, on the Banbury Road between Station Fields and Langford Lane, is an attractive historic pub called The Highwayman. Established in the 18th century, it has seen a number of name changes in its long history. In 1855 it became The Railway Hotel, Station Fields being the site of the former Kidlington Station, closed in the 1960s. In 1967 the name was changed to the Wise Alderman, then changed again by the present leaseholder to The Highwayman after he took over in 2009.

The Wise Alderman was a tribute to the remarkable Alderman Frank Wise, who died in 1966 after a distinguished career in public service. With little formal education, he worked for the railway all his life, mostly as signalman at Kidlington Station. He was also a magistrate in Woodstock, and occupied lead positions in local government: chairman of Kidlington Parish Council for many years, chairman of the then Rural District Council, and Vice-Chairman of Oxfordshire County Council, which used to give the position of Alderman to meritorious long-serving councillors.

In 1968, shortly after his death, the Parish Council established the Alderman Wise Award to commemorate his life-time of service and encourage young people to follow in his footsteps. Now worth £500, it is for career or personal development, and is given each year to a pupil at Gosford Hill School with a record of significant work for the community and the promise of future public service.. I have just had the pleasure of presenting it at the annual sixth-form awards evening--an engaging event with lively students and dedicated, friendly staff, altogether a terrific advertisement for the School.

One might be tempted to take the pub's last change of name as a sign of the times: from commemorating a lifetime of public service in the 1960s, to celebrating the Highwayman's extreme form of naked self-interest in the 2000s. But this would not apply to the applicants for this year's Wise Award. A total of seven were reduced to a shortlist of four, all of them worthy of the award for significant achievements in the service of the community. The winning candidate, Tim Millard, was chosen for his exemplary development of a system streaming church services to dispersed congregations during the Covid pandemic.

Frank Wise's life, and the council elections taking place at the time of writing, prompt another thought about local government. The May elections have generated some press comment on the extent to which this has been depleted ("hollowed out") in the last decades. This has not been the case for the Parish Council, whose income, largely from the Council tax, has remained steady: this year, as generally in the past, our share of the tax has kept just below the projected rate of inflation. But the District and County Councils have suffered enormously from cuts in central government funding, and services have been seriously damaged as a result. There can only be one conclusion: we need much greater devolution, of powers and funding, to local government from Westminster.

Finally, since my last report, I know of no developments, by the time of writing, regarding stakeholder discussions on Stratfield Brake.

DAVID ROBEY