

Mrs Freda Wheat

When 14-year-old Freda left Coventry's Frederick Bird School she was destined to train as a shorthand/typist to begin her career in secretarial work. Like many of her generation, she believed she was capable of far more than those early days seemed to offer, and when in 1956 the by-then married Mrs Wheat moved to Kenilworth she had already founded her own secretarial business in Coventry. Later, and with her children brought up, Freda was able to remedy this conceived gap in her education. In her 50's she took on a part-time job and with the help and support of her husband, Arthur, undertook an Open University degree course completing her studies with an honours degree in Social Science.

In Kenilworth Freda used her abilities to benefit her newly adopted town. A lifetime adherent of the Church of England she became a member at St. John's using her skill and enthusiasm to co-found a successful Young Wives movement. In 1979, she joined others at the church recognising a need for somewhere for the elderly to meet, make friendships and, possibly, enjoy a midday meal. When a room was provided by St. Francis Church and there were volunteers to run the service, the value of the concept was established. Successful negotiations with the County Council resulted in leasing premises at 65 Waverley Road. When a centre manager was appointed the present Waverley Day Centre opened in 1982 providing social activities on four days a week, and, of course, lunch. Freda played a major role at the Centre serving on the committee for over 20 years becoming chairman from 1988 for a six year period of major expansion and extension.

Even such commitment was not all. Freda saw that with no local Citizen's Advice Bureau there was a need to provide people, especially the unemployed, with help, advice and information. Unhesitatingly, over 20 years ago, she started her own Advice Centre based on the Citizens Advice pack continuously running two sessions each week from its inception in 1980 until the duties fell to the town's Connection just a few years ago.

A prominent member of the National Council of Women for over 20 years, Freda Wheat has made a valuable contribution to the well-being of many and it was fitting that in 2003 she was presented with the Town Mayor's award of merit recognising her long and valued commitment to the people of Kenilworth.