

Jim Grogan

An important part of community spirit is that people have ideas which will be of benefit to all of us that they then proceed to bring to fulfilment selflessly and often without praise - sometimes even without any recognition. We are fortunate that in Tarvin that we have many such people who, day by day and in many ways, work on tasks large and small, for the benefit of others. Mostly the benefits of their actions are felt in the short term by those around them. It is only very occasionally that someone has the idea and then succeeds in bringing to fulfilment something which will benefit both the folk here today and the generations still to come. Jim Grogan was such a person.

Jim looked at the orphaned part-fields left between the village and the A51 Tarvin by-pass and which were intended to help mitigate the traffic noise from the new road; fields which were neglected, uncared-for and unused (other than by dog walkers). He had the vision to be able to see their potential as a community woodland and, by dint of persistence, tenacity and sheer determination, he succeeded in persuading both the Highways Agency to allow the community to use the land and the Parish Council to take out a licence for its care and development. He was the first (and only) Chairman of the Environmental Sub-Committee of Tarvin Parish Council, a self-funding group set up to run that embryo woodland and, with help from a huge number of people and from an amazing range of organisations, he piloted the project through to the point where its care passed to a charitable Trust (Tarvin Community Woodland Trust), of which he was the Foundation Chairman. Thereafter the local authority (Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council) was able to award the Trust (and hence our community) a lease for 125 years.

Over the years, Jim and his volunteers brought the woodland to where it is today - receiving awards (including the Green Pennant, which is the national quality mark for green spaces) and being publicised in a booklet produced by the Government as a shining example of what communities can achieve – the so called ‘Big Society’ in action. Jim saw the need, provided the inspirational leadership and, quietly and effectively, brought together all of the people needed for a successful outcome. “You need horses for courses,” he would say and he always did know and could bring together the people who had the necessary skills and influence to enable the task to proceed. During the whole time that the woodland has been developing, he has been at the centre of everything and was prepared to work at least as hard as anyone else. He was always around when work was being done, demonstrating the most effective way of doing things and encouraging flagging spirits by word and by example.

More than anyone else, Jim KNEW the woodland. He’d helped plant very many of the trees and the wild flowers, he knew (but didn’t publicise) where all the different wild flowers were growing, he was aware of situations as they arose and he ensured that any necessary action was taken in good time. He walked the woodland every single day – an achievement that even dog walkers would find hard to match.

His ambition was that we would all have the opportunity to come to love, to cherish and respect that part of the beautiful Cheshire countryside in which we live and of which the woodland is but a small portion. He loved the countryside and he loved the woodland. It mattered to him that the woodland should be the best green space that it could possibly be – not for himself but for others who, he hoped, would come to love it too. He was especially keen that our children, the young people of Tarvin who will come to love and care for it in the years to come, should be encouraged in every way possible. He worked ceaselessly to develop and extend links between the woodland and Tarvin School and to establish the school’s Nature and Wildlife Award, which is sponsored annually by the Trust.

Modest man that he was, Jim always insisted that our wonderful woodland is entirely the result of the hard work and effort put in by many, many people over the years and any credit should and MUST go to them. And of course, that credit is entirely due. Jim’s slogan for the woodland became the Trust’s own slogan: “Created by the Community for the Community.” But without Jim, Tarvin would not have its woodland – and would be a far poorer place as a consequence. Jim’s legacy to the village includes a body of Trustees who are ready and willing to pick up the baton and, with the help and support of the people of Tarvin, to strive to maintain and improve the woodland so that, over the years, it becomes an even more beautiful, tranquil place.

Our memories of this very remarkable man will die with us but, a hundred and more years from now, Tarvin people will still be enjoying the woodland which is his legacy to his community. Many people have asked Trustees how it is intended to commemorate Jim’s life. The idea that the woodland should become “Grogan’s Wood” has been discounted. Jim would have hated it – he vigorously declared that it is Tarvin’s woodland, not his. However, the notion of re-naming the woodland footpath as “Grogan’s Walk”, the walk that he loved to do day in and day out, seems to Trustees a far better idea. Discussions are ongoing and there is likely to be more to say in the weeks to come about how else the Trust will commemorate the life of this very remarkable man.

The February 2011 edition of the RSPB magazine “Birds” quotes a Greek proverb: “A civilisation flourishes when people plant trees under which they will never sit.” They might well have been talking about Jim. Tarvin is a better place, thanks to Jim and I think we have all been privileged to have him in our midst. We will miss him.

Charles Bradley

Secretary of the Tarvin Community Woodland Trust.