

**Felicity Dick with a  
silver wine goblet  
made by George Hart  
of Chipping  
Campden**

**Photograph:  
Damian Halliwell**





*Felicity Dick (centre) celebrated as Appleton Community Shop and Post Office won the Community Shop of the Year award in 2003. Writer Helen Peacocke is pictured handing the award to Michael Mittel as Felicity looks on*

# Pillar of the community

Sylvia Vetta meets the Deputy Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Felicity Dick



*Felicity Dick speaks at a consultation on how Oxfordshire could save £60m at Wantage Civic Hall in 2013*

**C**ommunity involvement and charity work are very much part of the make-up of the seemingly tireless Felicity Dick.

When she married engineer Richard Dick in 1975 her life came under the influence of his family's famous Oxford firm, W Lucy & Co. The company, established in 1780, brought industry to Jericho in 1812, and the now vanished Eagle Ironworks has left its mark on the fabric of Oxford.

But while Richard has been spreading the ironwork's eagle's wings in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and India, Felicity put down roots in the county. But Felicity's life did not begin in Oxfordshire.

She was born in Bristol, the youngest of three sisters, in 1952.

Felicity said: "My father Vyvyan Cornwell was a chartered accountant with Curtis, Jenkins and Cornwell – one of the oldest recorded accountancy firms in England. In 1778, the possible year of the firm's inception, the wealth of that city was generated by the slave trade, wine and tobacco.

"Maybe there was a desire not to acknowledge that, because my father described Bristol as a city with an invisible wall around it. The social restraints when I was growing up could be quite claustrophobic."

"My parents married during the war," she added. "My mother was living with her in-laws when my father was badly injured. Her parents in-law never behaved in an unkind manner but they never forgot that my mother, Doreen, was from 'industry' and they were from the professions despite the fact that her father was director of the large ship-building firm, Swan Hunter.

"My mother lived next door to her in-laws and I lived next door to my in-laws for 30 years. There the similarity ends because mine were 30 happy years. Richard's mother Rosemary, known as 'Moth' to the family, was wonderful and we had a brilliant relationship.

"In contrast, the rather Victorian social constraints gradually weighed down on my mother. During the war she led an energetic life running canteens and working for the Red Cross but, like most women of her generation,

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*Felicity's  
desert  
island  
teapot*

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once the war ended she stopped working outside the home apart from her voluntary activities.

"When my sisters married and left home she became subject to post-menopausal depression. I felt a real responsibility for her," Felicity said.

"There was always a sense of having to keep up appearances, so I longed for a bit of adventure. We lived in Leigh Woods and I walked across Brunel's suspension bridge to get to Clifton High School where my sister Joanne had been tennis captain and hockey captain and my other sister, Carolyn, had been head girl – such hard acts to follow," Felicity laughed.

"My parents were both governors at Clifton which was a nightmare. Playing tennis helped. It gave me a sense of freedom, so that is why one desert island choice could be this tennis racquet."

Felicity produced an old Dunlop Maxply wood-framed, catgut-stringed racket.

"It is strange to think we played tennis with rackets like this. It reminds me of my wonderful tennis coach. He was a good coach

despite having a wooden leg and I became good enough to play at county level, and at Junior Wimbledon in 1968.

"Aged 16, I played the youngest girl in the tournament who was only 12 and I lost to her in the first round, 6-0, 6-0. A remark by the 'voice of tennis' Dan Maskell saying I'd never make it to (senior) Wimbledon did not help my confidence," Felicity recalled.

Looking for an escape from her home life the 16-year-old Felicity was given a chance to travel to the USA.

"In 1968, I heard that the English Speaking Union had arranged some exchange trips to the USA. If I could raise the money for the flight, I was offered the opportunity to spend four weeks in the States.

"I will never forget the experience at Bristol airport that Easter. I was to fly in the first jet aeroplane to take off from Bristol. The local press was there to see us off because of the newly-extended runway built to accommodate these powerful aircraft," she said.

"This was the 1960s and in my suitcase were my latest mini-skirts which I had made

myself. In sophisticated Boston they raised no eyebrows but once in, Kentucky it was rather different.

"The host father ran his own business in Lexington but one day, he drove me up into the mountains to meet his ten siblings. They were real hillbillies. The men wore bowler hats and braces and their wives wore ankle-length skirts in a Puritan style. They were somewhat shocked by my 12 inches of fabric.

"My hosts were religious evangelicals and asked if I could produce a longer skirt for chapel on Sunday. On the way they asked me 'When were you saved?' I replied that I did not understand what they meant. They rephrased the question to 'When did you find Jesus?' Still stuck for a reply, I simply said 'I am still looking.'

"That experience was to have resonance. At 18 I was ditched by a boyfriend who, while at Oxford, found faith and told me that he thought I was not a committed enough Christian.

"These experiences came as a shock to me, the sense that I was being judged by my

appearance and not by my values. Like my parents, I am not prepared to make judgments about people whose life circumstances are different to mine."

Felicity was enjoying another adventure when she met her husband-to-be Richard.

"We met while skiing in Zermatt, in January 1973, when I was 20 and he was 22," she said. "Richard had just graduated from Cambridge and was working for a company called Plessey on the Isle of Wight. They had sponsored his engineering degree on condition that he worked for them for a given period.

"We stayed in touch while I was in France working as an au pair. When I returned to London, I took a job with a wine company – the first to import Californian wines.

Richard proposed on the Isle of Wight and they were married in St Stephen's Church in the heart of Bristol in 1975. They enjoy a mutual passion for sailing and still have connections with the Isle of Wight – Richard is currently vice-commandore of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

Richard was the youngest of five children and was the only one who went into the family business. Felicity soon got to know about W C Lucy's – the last iron foundry in Oxford – and appreciated its nature as a family firm.

Felicity said: "Another possible desert island object is a silver wine goblet by George Hart of Chipping Campden. It was part of a set my parents-in-law gave me as a wedding present. It is practical and will remind me of the family and of our family firm," said Felicity.

The couple moved into a cottage on Netherton Road in Appleton and Felicity took an administrative job at Lady Margaret Hall.

It was Felicity's mother-in-law Rosemary who provided a fine example of the benefits of getting involved in the community – and she inspired Felicity to follow suit.

Felicity said: "She had spent over nine months in hospital with polio during the war and became an avid fundraiser for the Nuffield Orthopaedic Hospital.

"Through her I began to volunteer to work at the stroke club which employed innovative techniques for patients whose speech had been affected by stroke. After working for some time as a volunteer I also took on some paid administrative work for them."

While her four children – twins Polly and Juliet and sons Jonathan and Edward – were growing up, Felicity became deeply involved in her local community of Appleton.

She said: "My mother-in-law shared my love of tennis and when a friend, Liz Gilkes, and I wanted to get some tennis courts for the village she gave the land and charged a peppercorn rent."

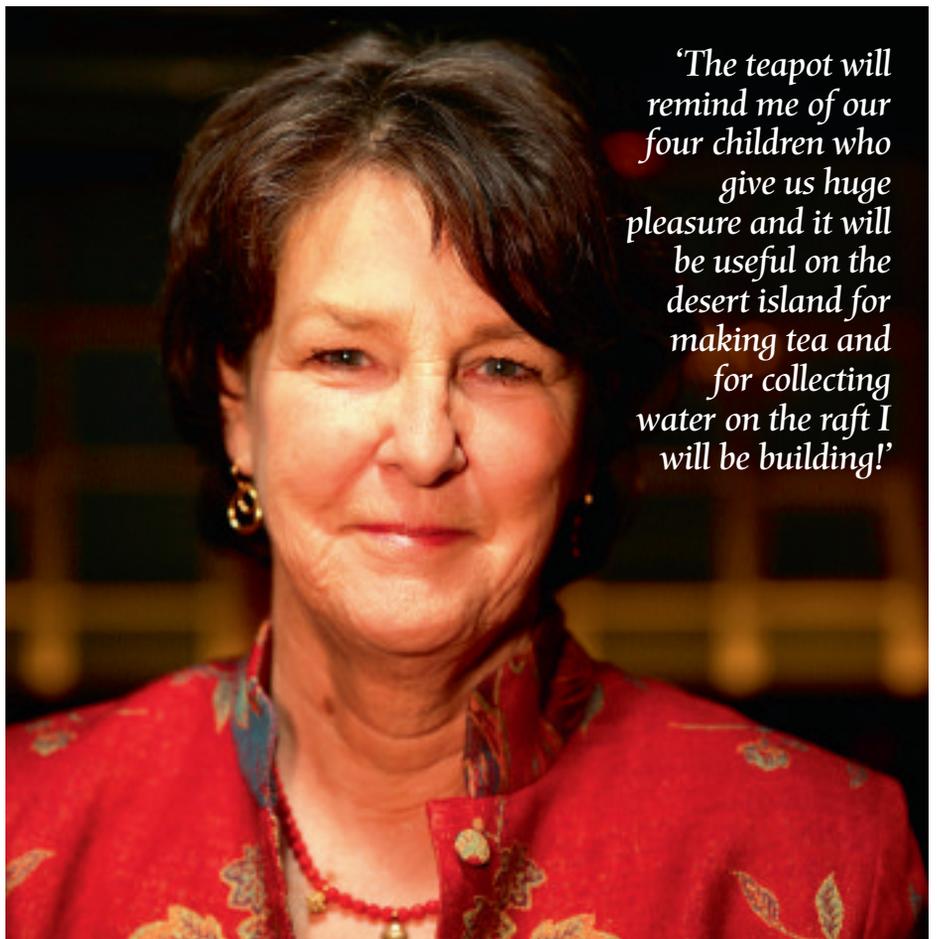
Felicity and her friends set about raising the money to build it. Trickier was overcoming some nimbyism to acquire planning permission. "I decided to go on to the parish council, to try and work through those differences of opinion," she said.

The club is now thriving with well over 100 members, two excellent courts and a clubhouse.

Then came her involvement with Appleton's village shop.

"The owners approached the parish council and explained that they could not maintain it any longer. However they were willing to let the community run it for a year on the peppercorn rent of £1.

"From a public village meeting attended by



*'The teapot will remind me of our four children who give us huge pleasure and it will be useful on the desert island for making tea and for collecting water on the raft I will be building!'*

250 people, six of us got together every week for six months to turn it into a community shop. We opened on May 1, 2000, and are still going 14 years later. To keep it open all year round it requires 90 volunteers – and that is ten per cent of the population of Appleton.

"The small supermarket chain Somerfield was willing to support our community shop and after the refurbishment, they stocked it for us. At the end of the first week, when we needed to re-order, we had reason to be glad that someone had the foresight to take a photograph of the shelves!" Felicity chuckled.

In 2005, Felicity applied to be manager of the Parents and Children Together (PACT) family centre in Sutton Courtenay which works with disadvantaged families.

Felicity said: "I was frank at the interview that I could not change my accent or who I am but they appointed me. Without the charity's faith in me I would never have met the fantastic families I worked with. They were living in difficult economic circumstances. OX14 was designated by the EU as an economically deprived area. I found it hard to believe that deprived areas existed in the heart of Oxfordshire but they do.

"I soon learned that, as a society, we have let down a lot of families. We help teenage mothers to get a flat but leave them isolated without support to help them budget, cook or cope with childcare. It was an eye-opener for me."

In 2009, Richard was appointed High Sheriff of Oxfordshire and, in the same year, in the same year, Felicity was elected a deputy lieutenant.

"One of the greatest privileges I have had was introducing the Queen at the Henley-on

Thames Jubilee Pageant to volunteers who had made extraordinary contributions to their communities. My geographical area is Abingdon and I involve myself in the civic life of the community."

Felicity loves the opportunities it gives her to meet a wide range of people as well as linking up people who can work together.

As a patron of Archway and OxPat, Felicity also involves herself in issues of isolation and homelessness. She is also a trustee of Oxfordshire Youth (formerly OAYP), an umbrella group for Oxfordshire youth clubs.

She is particularly proud to have been involved in the third annual youth awards which were presented in March at Oxford's New Theatre.

Felicity said: "The theatre was packed with an enthusiastic audience wanting to celebrate the achievements of 650 nominees."

She had come to the point where Felicity had to make her final choice to take to our desert island. Would it be the tennis racket or the silver goblet?

"On second thoughts, I'll take this huge Emma Bridgewater teapot," Felicity said. "It was given to me by my best friend Jane Cranston. Jane is also the force behind the *Strictly Oxfordshire* dance contest and other major fundraising events for Vale House.

"It will remind me of my friends, including members of my book club. We think ours started more than 33 years ago – possibly the first book club in Oxfordshire.

"The teapot will remind me of our four children who give us huge pleasure and it will be useful on the desert island for making tea and for collecting water on the raft I will be building!"