

A tribute to Fred Wickstead

FEW PEOPLE can have made such an impact on this area as Fred Wickstead who, sadly, died on 2 March aged 76.

When a service of thanksgiving was held on the 18th at St Michael & All Angels,

Mitcheldean's parish church was filled with those who had come to pay tribute.

We have much to thank him for. Aptly described as 'the architect of Mitcheldean', Fred was largely instrumental in the establishment and growth of this site.

He came from Aldridge, Staffordshire, to join the Rank Organisation in 1948 as production manager of the British Acoustic Film Company, then making Bell & Howell cine equipment in the former brewery buildings which today form part of the MEWS.

Within three years he became general manager, and when BAF developed into the cine & photographic division of Rank Precision Industries, headquartered at Mitcheldean, Fred was appointed its chief executive in 1958.

With the build-up of Japanese competition, the company sought diversification in the shape of xerography, and

Fred did much to ensure that the first photocopiers to be made in Britain were produced on site.

The company virtually exploded in the early 1960s, and when in 1965 Bell & Howell production ceased, the plant became part of Rank Xerox, Fred joining the board of Rank Xerox (Management) the following year.

In 1967 he was appointed director of production & supply operations, subsequently becoming a full member of the board of Rank Xerox and a board member of Fuji Xerox.

It was under his leadership that Mitcheldean developed into the largest employer in the Forest of Dean with a workforce of around 5,000.

Fred's contribution to both industry and employment in the Forest of Dean was recognised when he was awarded the OBE in 1971.

That same year he was appointed vice president, manufacturing & logistics, for

Xerox Corporation, based in Stamford, Connecticut – the first time any executive from a Xerox overseas affiliate had been appointed to such a key corporate position.

His departure meant the relinquishment of many important posts outside the plant.

A Justice of the Peace, he was also president of the Wydean Tourist Board. He had been chairman of the Forest of Dean Employment Committee and had served on the board of governors of the West Gloucestershire College of Further Education, as well as being a member of the management board of the



Engineering Employers' West of England Association.

In 1973 Fred returned to Rank Xerox as chief staff officer and group director based in London, retiring two years later. It was while holding this office that he set up the new pension arrangements, which he personally regarded as one of the best things he ever did for

employees, and he was the first chairman of the Pensions Fund trustees.

A 'man of vision', he was always conscious of the importance of good communications and, in fact, it was he who introduced this magazine in 1960.

Fred was always sure of a warm welcome when he attended the annual dinners of the LSA, of which he was vice president.

A Rotarian, he also founded two Probus clubs in the Forest of Dean and only a few years ago retired from chairmanship of the local Citizens' Advice Bureau.

The care of the mentally handicapped was long a particular interest of both Fred and his wife Alice. They celebrated their golden wedding in 1992, and our sympathy goes to her, and to their three children.

Fred is remembered with affection and gratitude, not only for what he achieved but also for his many acts of kindness and keen sense of fair play.

He will be sadly missed, but the legacy of his pioneering work in the early days of Rank Xerox Mitcheldean remains with us.