

The Mayoralty is above all a people business, it thrives on personal interactions, meeting and greeting, talking to people whether individually or in a large audience. And in Cllr Howard – Janice – we had a Mayor whose personality was ideally suited to that role, for both in her professional and political life, Janice is very much a people person.

If she wants to get something done, Janice would always prefer to come and talk to you about it, rather than send you an email. She exudes enthusiasm, and left me in little doubt of her enthusiasm to become Mayor shortly after she was elected.

So, I am glad we were able to set aside the convention that the Mayor is chosen only from the ranks of the ruling party, and select the best candidate for the job, recognising her enthusiasm and dedication.

Janice's year included all the important events that draw the community together, such as Remembrance Sunday and the formal wreath laying ceremonies which she led with dignity. Also Armed Forces Day and the moving Holocaust Memorial Day.

But there were lighter, fun and fund raising events for her two charities as well. I particularly remember the Sambrooks beer tasting evening at the Hand in Hand, a pub I hadn't been inside for 50 years. That was fun, as was the Mayor's Quiz Night at the Wimbledon Club, where consort Andrew gave an assured performance as quizmaster, pointing to a promising future in stand-up comedy. And who can forget the Silver Sunday tea, also at the Wimbledon Club? Certainly not my mother in law, for it was one of the highlights of her 104th year.

Then in March it all came to a crashing halt with the onset of Covid-19 and the lockdown. The last time we met in this chamber was on 4th March for the budget council meeting, more than six months ago.

The pandemic has warped my perceptions of time since then. Looking back to the events I've recounted is like looking through the wrong end of a telescope, they all seem curiously distant. Unremarkable at the time, they now seem particularly precious because they mark a time when we could be together and enjoy each other's company. And Janice was our Mayor for that happier time – let's remember the good things she brought us, and be grateful for them.

It's all too easy for the Deputy Mayor to be overlooked in tributes like this, but as in this case he's my good friend and Merton Park colleague Cllr Edward Foley, I must include Ed and his wife Miranda in this tribute, along with their two children Annabel and Sam. I know Ed has enjoyed his role as Deputy Mayor, and he's performed it with panache, whether it be presiding at citizenship ceremonies or visiting old people's homes. So thank you, Ed.

Cllr Peter Southgate