

Robert Browning, 80, moved from Churcham to Thrupp in 1955 when he took on Claypits Farm. His home is on the edge of Thrupp and near an area of the village with the romantic name of The Heavens.

"It has always been known as The Heavens," he said. "I have no idea why they call it that. I imagine it's because it's high up."

Despite being busy with his dairy farm, Robert was also involved with Thrupp Social Centre for a number of years. Nowadays he goes there twice a week to play bowls.

"My wife is the booking secretary of the social centre and there is an amazing number of things going on there – something for almost every day of the week," he said.

Robert got involved with the social centre through meeting people on his milk round. "I knew quite a few people due to my round," he said. "I delivered milk for about 35 years."

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***"Every day the birds are singing, the frogs are croaking and it all sounds absolutely gorgeous. I wouldn't live anywhere else."***

Joan and David Davies raise funds for charity every year by opening their garden in Thrupp Lane to the public and selling plants. But when they moved to the village 45 years ago, their third-of-an-acre plot was just a field.

"When we first moved in I didn't want to know about gardening," said Joan. "Then one day my son and I dug a hole, put some polythene in it and filled it with water. It went on from there."

Now Joan enjoys her flowers while David grows vegetables and soft fruit. Their garden is also a haven for frogs, toads, newts, dragonflies and birds.

Joan started propagating plants to sell for charity after watching a woman pay one and threepence for a piece of aubrietia in a flower shop in Stroud.

"I thought, 'I am throwing stuff like that on the bonfire!'" she said.

Since then she has donated more than £3,500 to charities such as the Cotswold Care Hospice, Winston's Wish, The Stroke Association and Arthritis Care through plant sales and donations from people visiting her garden.

What makes Joan's achievements even more remarkable is the fact that

she has had several operations on her heart. She says she owes her life to James Wisheart, the surgeon at the centre of the inquiry into heart operations on babies at the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

"I was born with heart problems," she said. "I had several operations including two lots of open heart surgery carried out by Mr Wisheart.

"I had a major operation when I was 32 and I was told I might be leading a normal life within five years.

"I was back working within six months and after a year I had swum a mile despite being told I would never swim. I always wanted to be a nurse. When I got to 45 I managed to pass the exams and I ended up working part time as a ward sister in Stroud."

Joan, who sometimes spends up to six hours a day in her garden, now has arthritis to contend with.

"All these shrubs I nurtured now help me because I hang on to them to get around," she said.

"Every day the birds are singing, the frogs are croaking and it all sounds absolutely gorgeous.

"I wouldn't live anywhere else."

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■ **ROMANTIC VISTA:** Thrupp farmer Robert Browning looks out across The Heavens.

Pictures by Dave Thomas C222298-DT04/C222298-DT02



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■ **FUNDRAISER:** Joan Thomas, far left, in her secret garden at Thrupp Lane, and neighbour Edna Langford, left. Above: The old tin church, a local landmark.



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■ **FIRM FOUNDATIONS:** Mike Juggins, a member of staff at Baileys Paints, top, and above, the Sutton Publishing headquarters on the site of the Phoenix foundry.