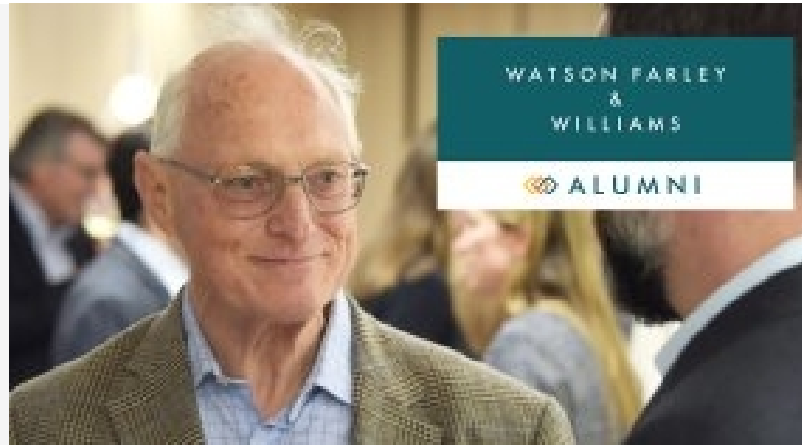


GIVING BACK TO GUERNSEY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW POUTEAUX

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Andrew Pouteaux was one of the partners on day one of newly formed Watson Farley & Williams in 1982, where he specialised in offshore oil and gas. He retired in 1991 and now lives in Guernsey, where he grew up, devoting much of his time to improving life on the island.

What motivates you to do voluntary work?

I am making good on a promise I made as a young man, that in exchange for being generously supported by the Guernsey government through my degree and post grad studies, I would one day give back to the island in some way. My aim is to support the work of Constables and Douzaines (parish councils) through fund raising, volunteering and getting others involved.

I want to help young people to connect with their island, through caring for the environment or getting involved in local politics. They are the future. I am also keen to open up the neglected areas of the island for the enjoyment of islanders and visitors.

How different is a typical day now from when you were a partner?

A lawyer's job can be largely passive in the sense of responding to other's initiatives. Increasingly it is now my initiative. For example, a parish presents a problem. Please paint the children's swings. I have to find the solution. What do I need for this type of task? I have the tools but materials have to be sourced, negotiated and paid for, insurance checked, a risk assessment undertaken, refreshments arranged. These need a mixture of thinking and action – phoning around, visiting companies, donors and suppliers, knowing how to ask. Projects are so varied, too, in size and complexity.

Tell us about one of your current projects.

The restoration of Fort George and the rediscovery of a battery there is one example. The decision to take this on has involved discussions with public servants, politicians, interest groups, possible sponsors, and companies providing volunteers or agreeing to provide labour for free or at reduced charges. Minor offenders are put to work with us on a regular basis and have been cleaning up the Fort outer walls. Getting them to feel part of the team and connect with society is the aim. Other projects are much smaller but money and resources still have to be found. It's important that potential company donors can visualise tangible results of their input – a bed of hydrangeas; a new path that enables residents of a care home to access a garden; a means of engaging their staff in CSR.

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How has your WFW experience helped you?

Being involved in the firm's start up took away fear of failure when creating Art of Living Community Volunteers from scratch. WFW was (and I am sure still is) a "can do" environment and this attitude is important in solving problems and pushing on when faced with obstacles. As a lawyer you develop confidence and this has been invaluable as have negotiating skills which are absolutely vital; my experience of oilfield contract negotiations has helped hugely.

What are your best memories of WFW?

In the early days although there was uncertainty, failure was unthinkable. There was a hands-on feeling that was enjoyable (if exhausting). Added to that, if you wanted to have a fax machine (yes that's right), you had to make a case for it or even buy it to show conviction.

What advice would you give to someone thinking of getting involved in volunteering?

Look for something you feel passionately about, that makes best use of your skills and that you will enjoy! It may be outside your comfort zone but that is half the fun and it brings huge personal satisfaction. Once in, keep a balance which means looking after yourself as much as the interests of the cause you are supporting.