



Press Release

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Refuse workers retire after each serving for 46 years

Two refuse workers are retiring from Fenland District Council after each serving for 46 years.

Peter Tompkins and Hedley Fynn-Brand each joined the council in the year Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister.

Peter, 63, said: "I turned up aged 17 and the next thing you know you're the father figure – or, now, more like the grandfather!"

"It is incredible to think 46 years has gone past. It's a lifetime. It's nice to think I've served the local community. It's not a glamorous job but a lot of people appreciate the work you do.

"If you like working outside and don't mind working whatever the weather, it's a great job, with a great bunch of lads and lasses. It's who you work with that makes it."

Hedley, 64, spent the majority of his latter 20-plus years with the council completing trade waste and recycling collections.

He said: "It's scary really to think 46 years has gone by. I speak to people and they say I don't know anybody who has been in a job that amount of time.

"I never expected to stay with the council all those years but it's nice to know I've been helpful to people."

Peter and Hedley were the longest serving among the council's around 65-strong refuse and cleansing team, where around a third of the team has served for 15 years or more.

When Peter and Hedley joined, the refuse teams didn't complete collections in inclement weather, instead sitting it out in the restroom. Health and safety rules were far less strict and refuse workers would ride on the outside of the moving vehicle propped on a step. They also weren't issued with full protective clothing or uniform, only a pair of overalls and a jacket.

Peter and Hedley were among the first crews to deal with the transition to wheeled bins in the 90s. Homes tended, in earlier times of reduced packaging, to produce one small bag of

waste each week where now every address has a general waste, recycling, and, where subscribed, garden waste bin. Homes will all soon have a [food waste bin](#) too.

Peter and Hedley have watched as Fenland towns and villages have grown so much bigger.

Peter's links to the council go back to childhood. When he was 12 his father Eddie took the job of hall keeper at the council's head office Fenland Hall, in County Road, March, and Peter lived with his family in a flat on site.

Neither Peter nor Hedley originally saw their career being with the refuse team. Peter joined the council expecting to follow the route of apprentice bricklayer and Hedley was to train as a carpenter. They ended up helping with council functions including highways maintenance (which was carried out by the district council then before it transferred to Cambridgeshire County Council) and open spaces maintenance.

Each transitioned to supporting the refuse team as loaders and then became drivers, both securing HGV licences in the mid-80s.

In the 80s, Peter was one of a four-man refuse team who entered and won the regional section of a 'Super Crew' contest run by Dunlop. They turned up not knowing what to expect and had to complete obstacle courses on foot and in the truck. For the final, in Birmingham, they had matching tracksuits and took a bus load of colleagues and family to support them, though sadly they did not fare so well there.

Cllr Steve Tierney, portfolio holder for refuse and recycling collection, said: "Our huge gratitude goes to Peter and Hedley not just on behalf of the council but all of Fenland for such long and dedicated service.

"Over the years I am sure they have each been guiding lights of wisdom and experience to countless incoming team members and a great support to the whole team.

"It's huge credit to the refuse and recycling team that so many of its members find a place where they want to stay and continue to be part of such a vital community function. I know Peter and Hedley will be missed but they can be proud to have been linchpins of that team."

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