

Portrait of a Villager

Continuing the theme of 'Portraits of a Villager' in Meon Matters had me thinking who next?

No need to worry as a chance meeting with the eldest member of a family who was born in the village and had spent most of their lives here, brought out the remark, "Our family have been in the village more than 100 years".

John Whitear is well known to many of the more elderly people in the village as a man who talks straight and speaks his mind. John, who lives in Chidden Close with Vera, his wife of 41 years, is the eldest of two sons born to Harold Edward Whitear (Ted) at Hockham Cottage on the Coombe Road. Ted, (John's father), was born in 1907 and was one of five brothers and three sisters and were the result of the union between Walter William Whitear (nicknamed Shep) and Ellen Goddard (Aunt to Herbie Goddard the former Chairman of the Parish Council and affectionately known as the 'Mayor of East Meon'). He was a shepherd by trade, but as John put it, "also a part-time Poacher/Gamekeeper". He worked for the Nicholson Estate at Bereleigh, and can be seen in the picture.



The other well-known member of the Whitear family to live in the village is Harold (Nobby) Whitear, whose father was Jack. Jack was born in the parish at Boredean Cross in 1903. Nobby is John's cousin and he has a sister Doreen, married to Pat Lanham who worked for the Wrens of Riplington Farm in his younger days. I asked how Nobby came by his name, "Ah", said Doreen, "when he was born the birth was attended by Doctor Clifford", (the red haired doctor, who many of us remember, who had an artificial leg and who resided at 'Doctor's Corner', where The Redpath family now live). "When Nobby arrived 'Doc Cliff' said to Jack, his father as he came out of the 'birthing' room, 'You've got a really Nobby lad there' and it has stuck all these years. The brothers, Jack and Ted, both worked on the farm. Nobby, Jack's son, left school at the age of 15 and went to work, like his father, on the farm, first for the Jones's of Hillhampton Farm, then for the Brian Blacker of Garston Farm, and finally for Michael Atkinson at South Farm, for 38 years.

In his time he was one of the stalwarts of the East Meon Tug-of-War team. A stroke in 2002 brought to an end his active life on the farm. However, he has now thankfully, almost recovered and he and Jeanette his wife live in Coombe Road and can be seen attending their allotment in the village, which he enjoys very much. He struck me as a very contented man, and when asked what he liked about East Meon he replied, "Its tranquillity".

John, on the other hand is a very different character, and at the age of 68, has mellowed considerably from his younger days. He went to school in Chapel Street, Petersfield and then onto the Secondary Modern. Leaving school at the age of 15, he first worked for George Bailey's Nursery before entering the Grenadier Guards as a Guardsman. After an eventful few years, that included a tour of duty to Suez in Egypt, he was promoted to Sergeant and sent to guard Windsor Castle. "That was an easy job", said John. When he came out of the Guards he spent two years at HMS. Mercury before joining the Electricity Board for 14 years. That was enough of being employed by others, and he turned his hand to window cleaning, chimney sweeping and gardening. He became self-employed and has been that ever since. He spent eight years as a Parish Councillor, and also as a School Governor, whilst his children were growing up, and did his fair share as a member of the Village Hall Committee. He was Standard Bearer for the British Legion (men's section) and the bearer when the standard was finally laid up in the Church, a few years ago. I asked John what he liked or disliked about the village. Unlike his cousin Nobby who said it in two words, I would need another article to do justice to his words. Best left till then. Eh?

Neither of the families has moved far from East Meon, and today most members of both families live within 10 miles of the village. There are too many children and grandchildren of John and Nobby to mention them all, but the two eldest boys of each family still live in the village, Ian (John's) works for Rogate Renault and Justin (Nobby's) works for Graham Tosdevine on the farm. The other children, Karen, (John's), who is a Management Accountant for a large motor group in West Sussex, are Michaela and Casey, (Nobby's) and all live in East Meon.

The last word must come from Nobby. When asked where the photo of all the family should be taken, he said "Outside the Isaac". "Why" I asked. "Because my father played darts there and he and I drank there and I still do with my son Justin". Let's hope they may all continue to do so into the future.

Denys Ryder

