

Frank Dicker 1927-2025

Frank was born a Welshman and lived in a small cottage opposite the Church in Llanblethian near Cowbridge with his parents Bertha and Robert and his 2 older brothers Robert and George. His Father was a gardener to a fairly wealthy gentleman by the name of Crawshay who lived nearby and so the cottage went with the job.

Just before the 2nd War Mr Crawshay moved from Wales down to Dorset and his gardener and family moved with him to live at Osmington. Crawshay in the big house and this time a bungalow for the Dicker family. This bungalow had a large garden and no doubt it was his father's occupation as a gardener that gave young Frank his passion for growing things.

As he was still a schoolboy, he attended the local school and was taught by a Miss Flint who thought highly of young Frank as the family found a letter she wrote upon his leaving thanking her little helper and with a gift of 5 shillings in stamps! Quite a bit then.

He left School at the age of 14 and started a Blacksmiths Apprenticeship in Weymouth where he learned a useful trade and developed those huge muscular hands he always had. As the war developed, damaged ships would be brought into Weymouth for repairs and Frank would be involved in doing his small part in these repairs. Luckily the war was finished before he was old enough to be considered for military service. But as a young man he followed the war's progress on the radio and newspapers and could see the planes going over heading for Weymouth. He learned a lot of Geography with all the countries involved in the war and kept a good knowledge of where different countries were.

Frank married Gwen in 1949, she was one of the residents of Tyneham evicted by the War Dept and never allowed to return. They went to live and work at Southdown Farm, a National Trust farm at Ringstead with a mix of hilly scrubland and pastures running down to the sea. This is where their children were raised alongside cousins and their parents Aunt Poppy and Uncle George who also lived there.

Frank helped with all aspects of farmwork, milking, calf rearing, thatching ricks, tractor work, hedging and harvesting.

Being inventive and good with his hands he came up with a good way to clear some of the scrubland by fixing short chains to a pulley wheel running horizontally between the

rear wheels of the tractor. Working on the slopes one day the tractor rolled over and nearly killed him. He staggered home really shook up.

In 1967 the tenancy was given up, Frank found a job 40 miles away milking a start up herd for Chris Thatcher at Buxbury Farm, Sutton Mandeville. The contract stated that he would be paid 5 ¼ d for every gallon that went into the churns. For those who don't remember the old currency a ¼ penny was called a farthing and there were 960 of those to a pound!

The decision was made to buy the cottage in Fovant where Frank lived for the next 50 years and where most of us remember him. He gave up farming and took a job in Wilton Carpet factory.

There he adapted well and was working in the seaming dept where the strips of carpet were joined invisibly together. It was another useful trade which he used to our benefit fitting carpets for all the families different houses!

He would sometimes go away for several days joining carpets on site. Even once at Buckingham Palace.

Without the tie of farming Frank and Gwen could get away and they went on foreign holidays for the first time to Yugoslavia and Spain really enjoying themselves. They visited relatives or family and loved a big family gathering. An annual gathering at Tyneham in the Summer became an annual treat.

In 1986 his son, Tim bought a smallholding in Wales and were visited by Frank and Gwen 4 or 5 times a year always helping with something or other.

After retirement Frank had even more time to get to know all his neighbours who he loved to chat with. As time went by some moved away and others came but Frank seemed to go on and on. He had a most wonderful memory and so could relate who did what and where they came from. He loved his fruit trees and could graft several varieties onto one stem. Still buying trees recently as though he would live for ever.

Nearly every neighbour would be given a birdbox which he made in his shed from broken pallets. Some even had owl boxes or even one for hedgehogs. He would fit dozens in Wales and give them away to whoever would take one. He did his bit for the birds.

Inevitably he became less mobile as the years drifted on but he was still driving at 95. During the last few years he fell and broke a hip but recovered fairly well, still managing mostly alone with help with shopping and his home helps. He had more visitors than most people of his age to keep him company. He loved to talk about the countryside, farming and gardening. He could sit in his chair by the window and watch the birds on the feeders or the hedgehogs he fed in the evening by the door.

A man who loved the countryside, was clever with his hands, never drank, smoked, raised his voice or spoke badly of anyone. He helped us all whenever he could and we could not have had a better role model as a father. We never told him we loved him, but, he knew. He knew.

Tim Dicker