

Frederick George Richardson

30th October 1927 ~ 3rd March 2019

Frederick George Richardson was born into a family of Fenland farm labourers on Sunday 30th October, 1927. He was the second oldest of four with one older brother and a younger brother and sister. Home was Fitton End, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Gorefield.

Life for agricultural labourers in the 1920s and 30s was extremely tough. They typically worked long days for six days a week and if bad weather stopped work, they would receive no pay. Ploughing was done with horses and harvesting was with a scythe. Children as young as five were expected to help after school, at weekends and in the school holidays and George was no exception. He would recall his childhood, working with his father and grandfather from a young age. It was mainly arable farming, but his family worked on fruit farms too. And he never lost his knack with a scythe. Even in later life, he would often cut the long grass, expertly by hand before getting the lawnmower out to complete the job.

Despite the many hardships he had a happy childhood although his mother certainly ruled the roost. George would often tell stories such as the time he was kicked in the face by a horse as a small boy. He ran crying to his mum who scolded him for putting himself in the horse's way, adding that he couldn't have chosen a more inconvenient time to get himself hurt – she was just about to have his baby sister!

He went to Gorefield primary school. He would have walked there and back in all weathers across muddy droves, wearing the customary short trousers, however harsh the winters. He was a bright boy who did well at school, even passing his 11+ but it would have been unthinkable for him to attend grammar school, an impossibility for a working-class country boy. It was simply unaffordable.

He did however join the army for his National Service. After completing six weeks basic training in Colchester, he was shipped to India. His abiding memory was of the many large and unpleasant insects with whom he often shared a tent. It was around the time of the Partition of India and British soldiers were there in number. Imagine George's surprise when he bumped into none other than his elder brother, also in the army, whom he hadn't seen for nigh on two years.

Mary became his second wife in 1971. Both were married to other people when they met, and some fifty years ago, it took much longer to seek a divorce. It was complicated, but they knew they loved each other and wanted to be a family together. They made quite the couple too, George stood a proud 6'3" tall in his size 10 wellies and Mary a mere 4'11" in her stockinged feet.

They were delighted when Beverley was born in 1967, followed by Petrina in 1970 and Marion in 1972. George had got a job working at the Brickworks in Peterborough and their first home with two small children, was a caravan in Eye. By the time Marion came along they had moved into a house on the Westward Estate in Peterborough, where they lived until George was made redundant in 1979. It was then, that George returned to work on the land and the family moved to Outwell.

His daughters remember their dad being the one to cook their evening meal and put them to bed, whilst their mum worked evenings. He was a good cook and his roast potatoes were legendary; he may have used copious amounts of fat but boy were they crispy. Bev remembers him teaching his girls to swim and ride a bike. Trina has great memories of getting up early on Christmas morning, creeping down the stairs with her sisters in a bid to get to their presents first, only to find her dad was already up with the fire lit, ready. Marion remembers running home from school and out into the fields looking for her dad, hanging out with him and climbing apple trees. On Sunday evenings the girls would be tucked up in bed listening to their parents with their friends having a laugh and playing dominos together. Bev would often creep down the stairs to watch, eager to work out how to play the game.

George could be strict at times. He didn't even have to say anything, he merely raised his eyebrows and gave them 'the stare' and they knew they were in trouble. But the girls knew he loved them and was proud of them too. He even let Trina sit on his lap and pick all the currants out of his hot-cross bun, one time when she had earache, something he never let her forget!

Family holidays were to seaside towns and George had a certain summer style. He would wear the same matching shorts and shirt set every year.... red and black stripes. He certainly looked a picture especially as life outdoors, working with his sleeves rolled up, meant his arms were always a beautiful deep brown, whilst the rest of him was as white as could be. Sometimes they would have caravanning holidays, often with Mary's sister and her family too – big, joyful, family affairs as they all descended on Butlins at Skegness or Haven at Mablethorpe.

Manual work kept him fit as a fiddle especially as he was so hardworking. He ate well too, which no doubt added to his good health. His whole adult life he bought meat fresh from the local butchers and grew his own potatoes and vegetables. He never learnt to drive, preferring to ride his trusty bicycle everywhere, something he became famous for, locally. George, on his bike with his woolly hat. It is very fitting that his woolly hat takes pride of place today.

His garden was his pride and joy. He had a flower bed and grew plenty of vegetables with never a weed in sight. After his father died, he took on his mother's garden too. Bev remembers it was the only time he would ever let her loose with a pair of hedge shears. He would never have kept up with it otherwise!

George may have been a quiet man who loved nothing more than pottering around in the garden, or reading his newspaper, or watching wildlife programmes on the TV, but he also had a wickedly dry sense of humour. Often, he would sit, quietly listening to the chatter all around him before casually dropping a witty one-liner into whatever conversation was taking place. Usually resulting in his children and grandchildren peeling into gales of laughter. His grandchildren will always remember his one-liners...and the sweets he always had ready for them...and his famous cheesecake, he bought one every time he went shopping to make sure he always had a fresh one when they visited. He had six grandchildren, Lewis, Deven, Charlotte, Isobel, Bethany and Jake and he was proud of them all.

He loved watching comedy too. Morecombe and Wise or the Two Ronnies, from the golden era of classic British comedy and Jethro and Mrs Brown's Boys more recently.

George and Mary, with the children all grown up, enjoyed many coach holidays together. They took a trip to see the Blackpool Illuminations, and went to Weymouth and to Wales. As they grew older, Mary and George moved to Beaupre Hall in Outwell to an assisted living home. Mary developed Alzheimer's and needed more care and George became increasingly appreciative of the fact that they had their three daughters close by, who were able to offer support.

When George reached the grand old age of 90, he was thrilled with his family party. It had to be small, he would never have liked a fuss. But there was cheesecake of course. George certainly lived a long and happy life, spanning nine decades, with rarely a day's ill-health. He will be remembered by his family and friends with great love and affection as a quiet, honest, hardworking, modest man, with a great sense of humour, who has left his mark on the world.