

ERIC DUNNING SPENCER



Although born in Stoke Poges he came as a very young man with his father and mother to the Homestead, a smallholding in Hempton (St John's Way houses are now built on one of the fields the cow grazed).

His first job was as a butcher's boy working for Mr F T Bolton who was also the baker and occupied the buildings now known as the Holcombe Hotel – Miss Annie Bolton, a daughter, had her French School in a part of the building. He later left Mr Bolton, as he was only earning 5s. a week, and went hedge laying and ferretting on the land covered by the Heythrop

Hunt. Eric with nostalgia remarked how this was a marvellous time in his life – out in the countryside all day and dealing with animals.

His brother, Eddie, being a foreman with Hinkins and Frewen in Oxford, encouraged Eric to join him in the building trade and this started his interest in stone work, especially the stone carvings on the Oxford buildings. The brothers travelled to Oxford each day in Eddie's old Ford 10. Here Eric remarked about the two Deddington brickworks and how these bricks were long and awkward and how we still have to put up with them in Deddington today in conversions and modifications to buildings. 'Bricks are dead, artificial, and manufactured, stone is real material and alive, one can talk to stone.' Here his face lights up when talking about stone and he produced some of the working tools from a cupboard in his kitchen – tools worn by usage – his wooden marled cord wedges which when placed alongside the quoin stones guided the stone builder; the quoin is the main stone in any stone work, be it house, wall or buttress. Eric said Deddington Church is an excellent example for persons interested in stone work.

House walls, say 2' wide, made of Hornton quarry stone built by a stonemason would have the help of one or two helpers who would infill between the two outer walls. This infill was not rubbish chucked in to fill a gap but stones placed in lime and mortar, and solidly built up as the walls rose. 'Try knocking down some of these old Deddington house walls, you will see I mean.'

In a relaxing moment during his work, Eric gets great pleasure in studying how the old stone buildings and churches are built. In any unit he builds he carves a stone which is placed in the structure, and invariably a tin with present day coins and odds and ends buried in the work. The last complete stone house he built was of Witney stone at Aynho.

Eric married on his birthday, a Saturday, and cycled to Kirtlington the following Monday to work. Cycling home one dark evening he was scared stiff by a man coming out of the hedges leading a brown bear! (Some people may remember the man with his dancing bear travelling the countryside.) Eric lives in a row of houses made out of brick and stone and posed the question, why were these Deddington brick buildings allowed to be built in between stone houses. Eric is a staunch supporter of conservation and cannot understand the country allowing the Coal Board to spoil the Vale of Belvoir, and he is an anti-vivisectionist.

He lives alone and his constant companion is his 14-year old Russell Terrier Beau Diddle. Eric has two sons, two daughters and nine grandchildren.

Bill Marshall