

Tribute by Kildare Bourke-Borrows

The very sad passing of Norman West represents a substantial milestone in our village community's history. He was the very last of that older generation who had been born in the village pre-world war 2 and who had lived here all his life. They have now all gone. It's a big moment.

Norman recorded 5 pages of reminiscences about his own and village life for the precious '*North Aston - A Millennium*' book when he was 66 (thank you Marcus & John for it). As you would expect from him they are very informative and clear, but also modest and amusing. He was born in 1933, and he talks about life growing up in the village in those days - no running water, just one fireplace for heating and cooking, a bucket under a seat in an outhouse for a WC, no electricity, a guttering candle that got blown out by the draughts as you went to bed. Out the back were a couple of pigs that were home-slaughtered, salted and hung up on hooks inside - that was about the only meat they had through the winter unless they caught a rabbit or someone shot a crow. They got eggs from their chickens, bread from the village baker, milk from whoever had a cow and they grew their own fruit and veg and preserved them as best they could to eat through the winter. They also of course collected as many hedgerow fruit and nuts as they could in the autumn. The village shop provided the few essentials that they needed and could afford. That's how life was then and what he is describing was almost exactly how his parents and grandparents lived before him. He, with his brothers and sister and other old village families lived their lives as a continuation of those previous generations. Norman was part of the shoulder generation, growing up in the old world, but seeing enormous change as the years went by, the latest of which was the installation of the village ground-source heating scheme - previously unheard of year-round hot water and heating.

He followed his father and grandfather into farm work on one of the tenanted farms; it's what most people had always done who weren't employed at the Hall or the Manor, and then went into the building trade. In their spare time they grew every kind of fruit and veg in the back gardens and in the allotments, and Norman's allotment double strip was always the very best, most beautifully kept and most productive of them all (and his strawberries were astoundingly large, delicious and tasty). He worked very hard in all weathers to make it so; of course the veg patch in his back garden was equally productive, and he grew lovely flowers in there too.

It was a life lived, for him, his contemporaries and ancestors, in complete harmony with nature, in spite of all its struggles and setbacks. He was born, grew up and then lived his whole life at 22 The Green, making a very beautiful garden on the Green side of his wall, admired annually by hundreds of people. There he brought his new bride Eileen, and there their two daughters Linda and Tracey grew up. He rarely left the village after he retired, and when he did occasionally for a short family holiday, he always said how lovely it was to be back. The last thing he would ever dream of doing would have been to jet off to Alicante for a week or two. Life in the village that he loved, with all the neighbours that he knew, with the drama of the changing seasons, the beauty of the land and the trees and hedgerows, the panoply of all the wildlife, was more than enough. We should all think deeply about that.

The only time I think that he went abroad was when he was sent to Korea on National Service, during the Korean War. He walked with a slightly military gait, even when a bit bent from age, which he may have acquired in the army. You would see him all around the village doing things or visiting people, often with a dog, and he visited every house every month to distribute the North Aston News for many years. You would frequently see him crossing the road from number 22 to the allotments - he never seemed to look out for traffic, it just avoided him. If you met him he was invariably cheerful and often responded with a twinkle in his eye and an amusing remark.

Norman was a practising Christian, very involved with the Church, and never missed a service or failed to ring the 5-minute bell. He was a member of the PCC for decades, mowed the churchyard unflinching and was a long-term bell ringer. He had little need to be reminded what the 10 Commandments were, he simply naturally practised them. He truly loved his neighbours and was always ready to go and help anyone in need, or give them advice from his great store of practical knowledge and good sense. He was a very kind man and you never heard him say something mean or nasty about other people. What an example to all of us who knew him.

He was as involved in village life as anyone. He would never need to be asked to come and help erect marquees and things; he just showed up and did it, staying until it was finished. He clearly remembered how things had been done in the past and by whom, and that was always hugely useful. So many people will remember him running the Bowling for the Pig which he ran at the Village fete every year and produced an immense amount of well-controlled hilarity and good humour. His opinion was invariably sought at meetings and what he said was always sensible and straightforward. He really didn't like complicated arguments (or sermons) - he would say 'I can't be doing with all that'.

A major interest in his life was the work of the Royal British Legion, the wonderful charity that serves members of the armed forces, veterans and their families. He had after all served in a theatre of war himself, and had known all the families who had lost fathers and sons in both world wars. He read their names in Church every Remembrance Sunday, and really cared that they should be remembered properly. Every year he walked round every house in the village collecting for the Poppy Appeal, raising a good sum of money. He was a long term member of the Legion's Deddington Branch, was their President from 2001 to 2008, and usually bore a standard at their Remembrance Day parade. "We will remember them".

A great feature of Norman's life was his frugality. He never seemed to waste anything and rarely bought new things. Why to buy new stuff when you could just as easily mend, or repurpose what you already had. Of course he wasn't in the least bit mean, he just didn't seem to want new things, clothes or shiny cars or the latest TV or gizmo. Many of us may expect new things that we buy to last 5 or 10 years; he expected them to last a lifetime, and they did. He came from a generation whose principle was '*make do and mend*'. Such a great example to all of us as our mouse hovers over the *Buy Now* button on our Amazon Basket full of here today and gone tomorrow things. You can see the result of all that at the Ardley Recycling centre.

Above all he adored his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and imbued in them a sense of belonging to this place, of loving and cherishing it. They all either live in the village or come frequently and carry on what is now 6 generations of his family engrained in this lovely place. Contrast that with the fast coming and going of people in all the new builds that are happening everywhere; they hardly have time to say hello to their neighbours before they're off again.

In Norman we have lost a true icon of what it means to belong to and form part of the nurturing of a community, our community, be modestly content with our lot, to quietly celebrate the natural world, to battle on in good times and bad (and in good weathers and bad), and to leave behind an example that is hugely worth following. We are extremely fortunate in our village that the Taylor landlords are very much in tune with what Norman stood for. He stood for the best. We really would do well to try to follow his example.