



## **LEN PLUMBE, 1921–2015**

Len Plumbe was born in Clifton in 1921, one of three sons to Frank and Sophia. He attended school in Clifton and Deddington before leaving at 14 to start his first job at Holidays Agricultural Engineers and Ironmongers in the High Street. It was here that he developed what was to become his lifelong passion for all things mechanical. He worked for a short time at Pressed Steel in Oxford making sea mines, a job he hated, and in 1940 he enlisted in the RAF.

After six weeks' square bashing in Blackpool, followed by various mechanics, fitters and engine courses, he was posted to RAF Stradishall in Suffolk where he worked on Sterling and Wellington bombers. One of his jobs was to recover damaged aircraft that crash-landed, Newmarket racecourse being a favourite spot. In 1944 he was posted to Bombay, not knowing the destination until he arrived. From there he was sent to Chittagong and on to Burma where he was part of a mobile Beaufighter support unit working from temporary airstrips cut out of the jungle. Len particularly disliked the jungle at night as there were 'eyes everywhere' and you never knew what was crawling over you in the dark. At the end of the war he was in Singapore where he turned down the chance to join the Australian Air Force and sailed back to Southampton and then on by train to Kirkham, Lancashire, where he was demobbed with eight weeks' pay and a suit.

After the war he drove buses for Stanley Hall for 12 months and then worked for Fred Price at Hopcrofts Holt as a mechanic, a job he enjoyed as at this time there were no new parts and everything had to be repaired. It was while driving for Stanley Hall that he met Marjorie and they were married at Horley in 1950. They had three sons, John, Richard and Stephen.

Len purchased Archway Garage in 1957, initially working long hours seven days a week, with Marjorie doing all the bookkeeping for the business. On buying a Morris 8 car which he lovingly restored he joined the Morris Register car club which opened up a whole new circle of friends for him.

As the garage became more successful he was able to find the time to take his family on days out at the weekend, steam rallies and banger racing among his favourites. In 1991, aged nearly 70, he decided to hang up his spanners and retire, although this only meant that he had more time to look after a friend's vintage car collection.

Len loved gardening and could be heard whistling his trademark tuneless tune while tending his plants. He loved to show visitors around the garden and most would leave with arms full of plants and cuttings. The arrival of grandchildren gave him a whole new generation to entertain, whether making things in the shed or inventing his own daft words to make them laugh.

When Marjorie became ill Len looked after her until it became too much for him and she had to go into care, a decision he took with great reluctance. Len enjoyed life and meeting people and was regularly seen around the village until shortly before his death at the age of 94.

*John, Richard and Stephen Plumbe*

More about Len's experiences in WWII can be read [HERE](#)