

## Stories from our community: Interview with Ken Fuller

'I was born in my grandmother's house in Farnborough in 1943. It's the reason Hitler didn't invade – he cancelled the barges!' Ken's deprecating wicked humour peppers our conversation. Ken's uncle worked at Sutton Place and aged 8 or 9 Ken would help to exercise the polo ponies. Unfortunately they bite. I prefer pigs, a most intelligent animal. Pigs won't ever wallow in their own dirt, they just need mud to roll in 'cos they over-heat.' Sutton Place was good though: 'I learned to ride a couple of the ponies, rode the sheep and played in the hay-lofts.'

At home, his mother allowed him to create an aviary, an interest that continues to this day. 'As a young lad I had two Indian runner ducks, a mallard, a golden pheasant, pigeons, love birds, finches and a cockatoo. Local children would knock on our door and ask to come and see them.' Eight years ago Ken's son suggested he create a new aviary. 'I keep mostly finches, Australian and African. I deliberately choose non-aggressive birds. I keep it warm with greenhouse heaters on thermostats and have lights as they need 12 hours of daylight to feed, a full spectrum light so they have Vitamin D, and they also need the right diet to breed.'

In contrast, Ken didn't enjoy school and left as soon as he could after his 15th birthday. 'Christmas 1958, we had a ceremony. All the boys leaving tied their ties on to the school railings, doused them in lighter fuel and set fire to one end.'

'After school I joined Martin Harper Engineering as an apprentice working on lathes and drills, spending one day a week at Guildford Tech. I gave my first wage packet to Mum – £2 11s 7d. To celebrate, she went to Woolworths and spent 10s 6d on a roast chicken. Those days you'd only have chicken at Christmas!'

Ken subsequently worked in a variety of jobs: building aircraft cameras, knitting clothing, the Co-op Dairy, a builders merchants where a fork-lift truck rolled over his foot and broke all the bones, the electricity board putting in cabling around the country, driving oil tankers, delivering eggs, post office sorting, maintenance at Queen Elizabeth Park Nursing Home and Guildford Museum. The list goes on.... 'I have itchy feet!' he explains.

Ken's eyes light up as he tells me about one job, working on a farm in Worplesdon. 'We had 300 breeding sows and pedigree cows. I really loved it, especially around calving time when there was a calf in trouble. I'd soap up my arm and reach down to find the calf, put some nylon rope round the hooves of the calf and pull it out'. Pensively he adds: 'I suppose it saved the vets fees! I would have stayed working at the farm but I wanted to marry and needed more money.'

He set up and ran K. F. Knitwear, mostly at Slyfield Industrial Estate for 15 years manufacturing and supplying sportswear to retail and sports clubs in the UK and all over the world including the England Cricket team and Wimbledon.

Ken wanted children and he and his second wife had three: a boy and two girls. Unfortunately his wife was very ill for 18 months so he became a one-parent family but he doesn't remember it as a chore. 'Going shopping was blissful. I'd give the list to the older one, aged 5. He'd read the items, the second one would find them and the little one would watch. I'd make "interesting sandwiches", constructing them into shapes, the kids loved it. Sometimes like Jenga blocks or noughts and crosses but that tended to cause arguments, Stonehenge was always a good one!'

So that Ken could be at home for the children he took night security jobs and was then duty night manager at Horsley Towers Conference Centre and Foxhills Golf and Country Club.

We have been fortunate that despite his 'itchy feet' Ken has stayed at Holy Trinity and St Mary's for 11 years, not only using his technical skills but showing kindness and care for people – not forgetting that wicked humour. He informs Robert Cotton: 'There've been lots of people who wanted my 'phone number when they heard I was leaving, in case they needed jobs doing... I gave them yours!!'

*'Tricia McIntosh, December 2019*