

LESLIE THOMAS KING (10th March 1927 – 5th October 2012)

Les was born in Coventry in 1927 to Gertrude and William King; a brother to Bill, Mary, Terry and Roselyn. He attended King Henry VIII Grammar School, passing his School Certificate in six subjects, two with credits. At school he was keen on sports particularly football, cricket and rugby. He left school during wartime, and trained as a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm, learning to fly Tiger Moths; but the war ended before he saw active service. He got a job as a landscape gardener with a company preparing sports fields and his first job was building a bowling green at Shipton-under-Wychwood. One Saturday evening he went to the Butchers Arms in the village for a drink and saw a girl playing the piano, his first meeting with Stella. They got talking and he escorted Stella and her friend to a dance at the Beaconsfield Hall. Stella said she was not too keen at first, but when she danced with him she was smitten. They were, and continued to be, brilliant dancers. The next week Stella took a cup of tea from her Aunty Mabel's to the bowling green for him and the rest is history!

Les worked for Jaguar cars, before starting a haulage firm with his brother Bill. He always remembers one contract delivering rabbits to a butcher in Warwickshire! At weekends he drove the lorry down to see Stella. They were married 1949 and moved to Coventry where they both worked in the car industry. They moved to Bampton in 1960 to be near Stella's mum and dad who owned a building firm and hardware store in the village, and they opened Kings of Bampton.

They'd never owned or run a shop before so came as raw recruits to the job and had to learn on the hoof. When Les and Stella turned up here to move into their new shop, there had been a mix-up over the contracts so, Stella and the budgie moved in with her parents, Dolly and Eric, for a month and Les had to stay elsewhere, because there just wasn't space for him as well. When they eventually moved in, they found the contents of the upstairs were very much a store of everything that hadn't sold over decades; as well as stock that did. It was an hilarious Aladdin's cave which gave them many laughs and it also took them a long time, and a lot of hard work to get it all cleared out, and the upstairs made into a home.

The items on sales gradually settled to those of a drapers plus ladies and gents clothing and some footwear and they made a great success of that. They also tried offering made to measure suits which were beautifully made. Fittings were done after the shop closed. Hoppy Smith who lived in the caravan on the left as you go out of Bampton had one suit made. When he went to London he went to a Jewish tailor and asked if he could make him a made-to-measure suit with the same quality material and if so, how much it would cost. The answer was, yes, he could, and the price quoted was three times more than he'd paid in Bampton so Hoppy immediately ordered another one from Les & Stella!

They worked non-stop for their first 5 years in the shop, never once having a holiday, and Les in particular became very run down. Dr. Bullen realised he wasn't going to be able to persuade them to go away on holiday so prescribed Guinness and oysters. Les loathed oysters but he dutifully consumed them along with the Guinness as prescribed and eventually felt much better.

About 10 years after they bought their shop on High Street, they sold up and went to live in Kenilworth for a couple of years, where they bought a dilapidated house, turned it into a wonderful home, sold it ... and came back to Bampton where they bought the Wheat Sheaf pub in Bridge Street and turned it into the Post Office. Les and Stella worked as postmaster and postmistress for 10½ years. The Standard, Times and Echo for April 24th 1981 marked their retirement by saying, "*Both Mr and Mrs King have endeared themselves to all users of the post office, having been extremely helpful and cheerful at all times. Les in particular is well-known for his sense of humour and quizzical quips.*"

When Les and Stella finally retired from the post office they converted the barn that stood right behind it into a home; doing much of the work themselves, and (with big smiles), called it "King's Court". The newspaper article quoted earlier went on to say, "*Les is a keen gardener and he is hoping to devote more time to his gardening activities.*" I understand he was particularly fond of growing dahlias. From there they moved to Minster Lovell; but Bampton called them back yet again and they bought a house in The Pieces which was to be their final home. Les enjoyed talking about life in Bampton and his amazing collection of old photos; but this was shortly after Stella died, and he obviously missed her dreadfully ... and continued to do so.

His family want to pay tribute to many special friends including Gary and Anne (Stella's relations), Ian and Sue, Joan; David, Rosemary and Nigel, great neighbours where they went for Xmas lunch every year. They have asked me to say that Les's family are so grateful to everyone for their help and care. Les was a loving brother and Uncle; he will be greatly missed. But, finally, his loneliness is past ... and he and Stella are re-untied once again.

The above is partly from Les's funeral eulogy and partly from a wonderful afternoon spent talking with Terry and Janet Rouse in 2009.