

Memories of Walter Pickering

By P H Shucksmith in 1996

In 1966, I recall three events occurring in Alvingham. This chapel roof caught fire one hot windy May afternoon. Pru Green came to the carpenter's shop to start her pottery and Walter Pickering came to live at Hawthorn Cottage with his wife Lilah and son Martin. After a short settling-in period, Walter and Lilah took an interest in village activities – a willing horse is always very acceptable. Here was a man who not only had ideas and enthusiasm, but he was a leader, able to motivate others who hardly dare not follow his example. The Village Hall activities received a renewed vitality under his guidance; necessary maintenance he undertook personally. The heating in this chapel [situated next to Trafford's stores], from where I speak today was installed by him after the fire and very effective it is too. The Parish Council soon found a place for him. At the 1972 Public Enquiry, he presented the P.C. case opposing the building of a large reservoir to the north of the village. This was successful and preserved the north horizon. Walt was involved in a host of initiatives which issued from his fertile mind. The horticultural show and garden competition flourished for a number of years. He arranged displays of bygones together with some older village characters to describe life in past times. Walter invented a new word to describe his latest fund-raising idea – it was the 'Barnfeastfrolic'; a meal, entertainment and dancing, a great success, becoming an annual event. Possibly his most lasting initiative to the village and possibly the most surprising, having been brought up in a family with strong Methodist traditions, was his idea of a social club at the Village Hall. From humble beginnings, this has flourished to provide an asset to the community extending to Yarburgh and Cockerington which I am sure Walt would heartily approve of and have a drink to its success.

Walter was a founding member of the Louth Male Voice Choir and sang with Lilah in the Louth Methodist Choir.

I am sure he was a great colleague at his work in the Post Office, well known and highly respected over a wide area which he covered as a Post Office engineer. I believe his ideas prompted many labour-saving and efficiency-promoting schemes at Grimsby Post Office, particularly sorting Christmas mail.

Alas, good health was not his good fortune and osteoarthritis is a distressing complaint, particularly as in Walt's case; it severely restricted his mobility. He gamely disregarded it for a while, surgery was only partly successful but he was determined to make the best of life in a wheelchair.

Walter and Lilah had for some years been trying to find suitable housing in Louth and in 1996, succeeded in moving to a flat in James Street, ideally situated for access and shopping. Lilah's surgery on her knee led tragically to her unexpected death soon afterwards. After many years of happiness together with Lilah latterly tending to Walter with love and devotion, this was enough to break his heart.

However, with nursing help, he carried on as usual as best he could. He still attended all the functions that he possibly could; chapel at Alvingham, the ANTS and NATS on a Tuesday night after which Geoff and I went home with him for a coffee and chat. His wheelchair

became well-known in Louth; he had a few scrapes negotiating pavements. After being forced to give up his hand-controlled car, the wheelchair was his only means of travel and to the bitter end, he used it after he had moved into the Elms. We can only imagine the thoughts of Walter's last months in the home, where he must have remembered the past, hopefully with some satisfaction, of his active life used for the benefit of his family, his friends and anyone he came in contact with. Alvingham was fortunate that Walter and Lilah decided to live here for almost 30 years, the longest stay anywhere during their lives and we are grateful for Walter's contribution to our village life.