

## BOB MANN

Mr Mann, who lives at the Old Maids Head, is well known around the village as a dustman, mole and rabbit catcher and churchyard maintenance man.

Mr Mann's father was born in Church Road (not in the road of course), and remembered the racecourse and the mile run from Funnell's Farm to Burman's.

Bob Mann himself, however, was born in 1914 in Wolferton; his father was a gardener at Sandringham.

Aged 14, Bob was apprenticed to Queen Alexandra's carpentry school. In those days the parents of an apprentice had to pay the employer a premium to take him on and the training lasted seven years. The new apprentice wasn't paid until he'd worked for a month. Mr Mann showed me his apprentice piece, a sturdy oak stool with carved patterns on the seat.

During the war Bob was with the Territorial Army at Wolferton. They would be in Dersingham Bog and shoot at targets with .303 rifles. They also stole moorhen eggs; good eating, he says, which they scooped up from the nests with a spoon tied to a long stick, two at a time, or four with a tablespoon. The men weren't much loved by Fred Bridges the gamekeeper, who must have been related to Tom Bridges, from whom we bought our house in Bilney. He had been a gamekeeper at Sandringham too.

Mr & Mrs Mann were married in 1939 at North Wootton, having met at a dance. In December 2009 they received a card from the Queen to mark their Diamond Wedding.

When Bob got a job with a coach makers in Surrey his father shook his hand as he boarded the train at Wolferton Station, and pressed a ten-shilling note into his hand. He stayed in Surrey, becoming chairman of the workers on the shop floor, until an industrial injury and failing business pushed him into leaving.

He returned to East Winch in 1970, buying from Bullards Breweries the Maid's Head, and the land on the opposite side of the A47, where the village pound for stray animals had been. With the house came commoner's rights to graze three head of cattle and to cut sticks.

Bruce Taylor, then living at East Winch Vicarage and responsible, among other things, for refuse collection in Freebridge District Council, got him a job as a dustman. This horrified Bob's mother who thought he was throwing his skilled craftsman status away. Not quite however; Bob built a

splendid wooden veranda attached to the back of his house.

As a dustman Bob was ideally placed to take a peek at other people's vegetable gardens to see how their strawberries and beans were doing. Nobody else's (at least not ours) was ever as forward as his. He still will sell you a punnet of freshly picked strawberries and some runner beans.

In his spare time Bob bred ferrets (round about 42 of them), chickens (only 20) and pheasants. He would go ferreting all over Norfolk, or mole catching; he would wait for the mole to emerge and blast it with a shotgun.

Until very recently, Mr Mann mowed the churchyard, lately helped by his daughter Helen. He is one of those people who have managed to keep retirement at bay until the very last moment.