

From Dinton School to Head Gardener via Tobruk.



Geoffrey Ernest Weedon was born in Ford in 1915, son of Arthur Weedon and Annie Louisa (nee Jeffrey) and brother to Stanley. Geoff would have started school in Dinton at the age of four and remained there until he reached fourteen. On leaving school he started work at Dinton Hall as an under gardener where he was taught all the arts of gardening which was to play a great part in his life. Geoff was a bright lad and learned very quickly, retaining this knowledge throughout his life. In the early 1930s he played cricket for Dinton and was a good all rounder but peace in the world was very quickly coming to an end with the onset of the Second World War. Geoff like all the other men of that age was required to join the armed services and in 1940 he was recruited into the Royal Tank Corps as a wireless operator. On January 1st 1941 he married Kathleen Pointer in Quainton Church. She was at that time working in service at Alwyn Lawn in Stone.

After initial army training, which took a while, was over Geoff left the shores of England and soon arrived in North Africa to take part in the action against the German and Italian forces lead by the legendary Erwin Rommel. Contained in Tobruk the British force was under siege and in June 1942 Tobruk fell to the enemy and Geoff and many others were taken prisoner. It would be three long years before he would be a free man again to return to Dinton and during that time he endured and saw much suffering and hardship.



From Tobruk the POWs were taken to Italy (Naples) by ship and it was here Geoff received his first letters from home. A letter from his wife telling him that he had become a father of a baby daughter. The letter included a photo of their child (Anne). He also learned of the death of his mother who then lived in Upton.

From Italy he was transported to Czechoslovakia to work in the coal mines which was very hard work. The food rations were poor and generally inadequate. During his time in Czechoslovakia he met other prisoners whom he knew from the Aylesbury area including his wife's brother Bertie who was later shot and wounded by a German guard but fortunately survived and returned safely to England. Geoff also made friends with some Polish and Ukrainian workers and he would share his meagre food ration with them. He often wondered what had become of them.

When the war ended in 1945 Geoff was flown back from Prague to England (his first aeroplane flight!) and was soon reunited with his wife and he met his daughter for the first time. (Anne was now almost three years old). At first she did not want to know this 'stranger' but after a short time Geoff soon won her over. When Geoff arrived back in Dinton, flags and bunting bedecked our house.

Geoff left the army in 1946 and returned to his gardening job at Dinton Hall. Sir William Currie also provided Geoff with Ivy Cottage in Dinton for him and his family. In June of 1946 their son Michael was born. We always refer to him as Michael to avoid confusion as he was christened Geoffrey Michael. He was given the name Michael because the young Ukrainian boy who worked in the Czech coal mine with Geoff was called Michailo. In 1947 the head gardener at Dinton Hall retired and Geoff was given the position which he held until ill health forced him into early retirement in 1982. He would ride his bicycle to and from work including weekends as the greenhouses needed attention on Saturdays and Sundays! Geoff eventually learned to drive a motor car and having obtained his driving licence they purchased a small car. The car opened new opportunities to be able to visit families and friends more easily. During his time as head gardener he occasionally played cricket for Dinton and for Sir William Currie's XI.

Geoff left school at the age of fourteen and he was very bright. I would often visit Ivy Cottage for help with my mathematics homework which he gave willingly! He also taught me how to prune roses among other things. When he became ill tests were done and it was found that he had become allergic to grass!! He was told that he must give up his job immediately. Geoff was devastated but resigned to the outcome given to him by his medical advisors. On leaving Dinton Hall after 49 years service he and Kathleen moved to a bungalow at Roundhill in Stone. Giving up the car and his much loved gardens could not have been easy for him but he knew that it had to be.

Geoff later wrote his recollections of his time as a POW and pays tribute and gratitude to the Red Cross for all their support and help that he received from them. He also thanks God for his faith which helped him survive his ordeal as many men did not return.

Geoff died in May 1990 and his funeral was conducted in Dinton Church by the Rev. Richard Challinor Watson (Bishop of Burnley 1970-1988) who was the son of the late Col. F. Watson of Glebe House Dinton. Richard Watson had known Geoff for a long time when he lived in Dinton. Kathleen died in 2006.

My thanks to Geoff's son Michael for his help in producing this article.

G.S.Weedon.