

## Ray Jackaman 1934-2017

- I want to start by saying, Ray was one of Grundisburgh's great characters. I lunched with him for several years, not in his home, that might have been going a bit too far - but at the Lunch Club - he was always SO friendly - so welcoming- always engaging in conversation – the only problem was his accent was such that I didn't always understand everything he was saying! He always asked me about my son and enquired of other people too – I shall miss him – big time! Bless him.
- For all his eccentricity, Ray was a local boy - lived in and around Grundisburgh all his life, in his early years he lived in Stoney Road, in one of the houses that were then called Roadman's Cottages. His father Walter, worked as a lengths man for the council, which involved looking after a particular stretch of road in the village, all year round in all weathers.
- At a later stage he lived at Bonds Corner – it was tough living – water collected from a stand pipe and as Cherry remembers carrying your bucket on the handlebars of your bicycle.
- But Ray was well known around the village for his James Greeves motorbike, which he loved to ride about locally. His main claim to fame was riding up his front path and into the car of the Revd Fox from Charsfield. Word has it, that Revd Fox spent the next 2 minutes covering his ears, even though it wasn't his fault.
- He attended Grundisburgh school, from the ages of 5-15, as there was no secondary school in those days. It was about this time that he gained the nickname "Muncer"- we think this was because he was a fan of Glamorgan Cricket Club, who had a fast bowler called Muncer. Ray would announce to just about everyone he met how many wickets Muncer had taken that day.
- He moved with his parents to the top of Orchard End until they died in the 1970s and then he lived there alone. Well not quite alone- there were always the chickens! School children and parents who passed his bungalow on their way to school, always loved to see new chickens which Ray had hatched. Some of the children had their own name for him "Charlie Chicken". He lived for his chickens and his cockerel "the Colonel" was like a pet to him. Donations in memory of Ray will go to the RSPCA, as they have taken the last of his poultry and he loved all animals. He never married and had no brothers and sisters, so he was a loner - but never without friends - really good friends who cared for him – Sue and Keith; Cherry; Derek; Mandy; Karen; Linda and Hugh; Sally and Manny; there may be others I don't know about – but whoever you are THANK YOU.
- Ray was so very grateful to all the people that helped him out and would often buy chocolates or beer for them. He had a generous heart.
- His working life began at Tuddenham Hall, doing something on the farm, we're not sure what, but for the greater part of his working life, he worked for Suffolk County Council in road maintenance/transport dept. After retirement he worked in various gardens for Lord Cranworth, the Gurdons and Roy Taylor. He kept immaculate records what he had done on each visit.

At the age of 18 Ray was called up for National Service in the army. Cherry has found paperwork, which says both that he served in the Suffolk Regt and in the Essex Regt – it is a bit confusing! What is clear is that he fought in the Korean War. In Jan 1954 he began his return journey home, leaving Yokohama in Japan on the troopship Empire Windrush, with over 1700 people board, men, women and children. On 28<sup>th</sup> March off the coast of Algiers, the ship caught fire, all except 4 crew members were saved. The rescue was one of the greatest in sea history. The journal of The British Korean Veterans Ass'n, says that "only remarkable discipline averted many deaths"

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Cap W Wilson, master of the 14,651 ton ship said “the fire was brutal. It was a flash fire. As soon as I had given the alarm an officer came to the bridge to warn me that the fire was gaining and that an officer and 3 men had perished below. The engine room was gone. Nobody could live down there. The smoke was pouring all over the ship. It was acrid and flames were shooting out all over. That’s when I gave the order to abandon ship”.

Terry Frost recalls Ray telling him, “an officer asked him, if he could swim and Ray said “No sir”, he replied “well you’re about to learn”. He went overboard and only a few years ago he was able to make contact with the man who saved his life, as Ray had no lifejacket and as we now know couldn’t swim and the man gave him his life jacket. We don’t know the man’s name, only that he lived in Scotland. They sent Christmas cards to each other for several years, but that stopped a few years back, we believe that friend has since died – but his actions saved Ray’s life – they were heroic!

But it was what he did in leisure time that defined Ray as much as his work – he played and managed several local football teams including Grundisburgh Reserves, Charsfield and Monewden. He would often be seen riding round on his motor bike to check that players were available for matches – in the days before mobile phones. I gather he was a good centre half and I’ve heard tell that he was a tough but fair referee. He played with or managed Roger Osborne (FA Cup winning goalscorer) before he was discovered by Ipswich Town. Roger visited him at home after Ray had his stroke and that brought Ray great pleasure.

After match debriefs took place in the Half Moon, where Ray partook of a few.... He was a "rum ol boy" as Ray himself might have said!

- In later life, when not able to get out and about as in his earlier days, he loved watching sport on TV especially cricket, football, darts and snooker.
- He used to travel with his great friend Ernie to watch cricket and football. They were friends for over 60 years and Ernie only recently died.
- I think it is fair to say Ray always had an opinion on everything and loved a good debate (argument?).

We shall miss him – he was one of life’s characters, but now he resides in the greater love of God, the God who welcomes him home. May he rest in peace. Amen

Clare Sanders

## DRAMA AT SEA

It was while we were recording memories for the 'Grundisburgh Remembered' project celebrating the Millennium, that Ray Jackaman related to me his experiences aboard the Troopship 'Empire Windrush' on 29 March 1954.

National Serviceman Jackaman had been shipped with his unit to engage in the Korean War, but when they got there the war was over and they were shipped home again!

On the return journey the ship called at various ports, picking up service families and invalided service men - 1,500 men, women and children. At some point off Algiers there was an explosion in the engine-room which killed four crew members and spread fire throughout. The alarm sounded and eventually the order was given to 'abandon ship'.

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When Ray and his mates went to collect their life-jackets they found they had already been 'collected' by others, and as Ray said in a massive piece of understatement "some of us were in a bit of a muddle" - a 'muddle' for him certainly - unable to swim and no life-jacket! As he hesitated on deck an older Scottish serviceman advised him 'you'd best get off here laddie' and when Ray explained his dilemma the 'Scotsman', as Ray described him, gave Ray his own life-jacket. "I wish I could meet him, and thank him" Ray told me, nearly 50 years later, "he saved my life".

### **Making History**

I told this story to Ivan Howlett who was part of the BBC team who produced the Radio 4 programme 'Making History' and who was helping us with the 'Grundisburgh Remembered' project. In response to an invitation from Ivan to record his story, Ray's own 'history' was played on the Tuesday afternoon 'Making History' programme and, to the delight of all concerned, the following day the sister of Ray's hero contacted the BBC - her brother was still alive and living in a retirement home!

He and Ray were put in touch, Ray was able to express his heartfelt thanks and they remained in touch with each other until the death of that brave kind man who'd saved Ray's life - and I know how grateful Ray remained until his own recent death.

Madge Nicholas