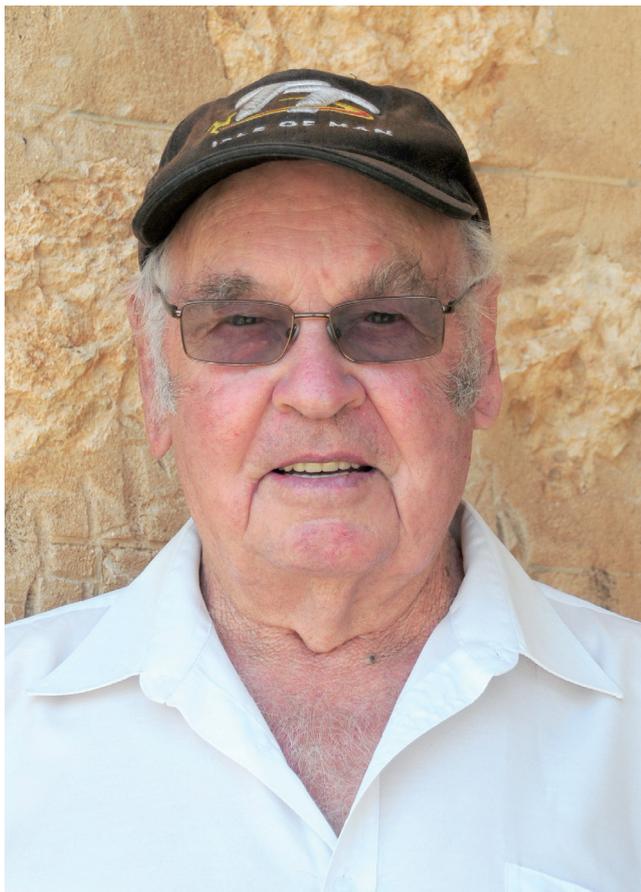


Jeff Feast - April 2019



I was born in 1935 at Edenbridge, Kent (the garden of England), the first boy in a newly opened Maternity Home operated by a Dr Jefferson Coalthard, hence my first name.

I grew up on Greybury Farm Estate Marsh Green where my father was the bailiff.

Early exploits into horticulture were more of the hunter gatherer, picking blackberries, chestnuts and various other berries, fruits, mushrooms and nuts.

An early memory was picking blackberries with the family when there was a strange droning noise and the sky was covered with aircraft, German Bombers which were being harassed by a few Spitfires - my father told everyone to hide under the trees.

School Begins

I started school in 1940 and it was a one and a quarter hour walk to the village - I stayed with grandparents nearer the village of Marsh Green during the week.

Here I was expected to help as much as I could, draw water from a communal well for daily use, collect newspapers from the village store on my way home from school and deliver them to the houses in Greybury Lane.

It was from my grandparents I obtained

my love of gardening - they had a very productive garden, supplying themselves and extended family with fruit and vegetables - potatoes, carrots, cabbage and scarlet runner beans, as well as raspberries, gooseberries and three different currants which were made into pies or jams - I wonder now where the sugar came from with rationing.

War and Evacuation

1943, together with my younger brother and sister, I was evacuated to Brading on the Isle of Wight, where I was introduced to mulberries which grew on a tree which was huge to a seven year old - it was taller than the house which was three stories high and when it rained you could shelter under it and not get wet.

This house belonged to a Major Goldman who was my father's boss at Greybury, reputedly the fourth richest man in the world at the time, owning land in Africa and Canada.

When the V1 and V2 doodlebugs stopped, we returned to Greybury, then the war ended, Major Goldman died and the estate was sold and broken up into smaller farms, so change of employment for my father and change of address.

I went to Lingfield County Secondary School where in my second year a farming course was introduced and because of my father's occupation I was put, no questions asked!

Teaching the Masters

and growing prize winning produce

I did not really want to be there and as it turned out, I knew more than most of the masters who were returned servicemen who had done crash courses in teaching.

I had to show the masters the correct way to milk a cow, thatch hay and corn stacks - things I had been doing all my life.

This did not make me very popular with the staff, especially when the head master praised me in front of all the school.

I did a lot of gardening at the school also and began showing my produce and won a prize for the largest marrow at the Guildford Show, but it was useless by the time it reached home with everyone tapping it.

I also won ploughing and thatching competitions as well that year.

A Trade set in Stone

My father advised that I got a trade, as he predicted there would be less work for farm hands in the future, but with a trade I could always go back to farming if I wished.

So I went to work at W.G. Hardings and Sons as an apprentice mason.

Gardening became an after work occupation which had to compete with motorbikes - riding, building and racing them.

Then along came National Service in Yorkshire, where the only gardening I did was for a Captain Spencer for whom I became Batman for a few weeks following my return from embarkation leave which I was on when the fighting ceased in Korea.

While I had been away my family had moved to Hartfield where I helped develop a large garden which was enclosed by stone walls which I built - this took a little over two years, after which we moved back to Prinkham and had to start the garden all over again.

Meeting Anne

Shortly after this move I met my wife Anne - after we married we moved into Troy Town, four, two up, two down cottages - no electricity, a bottle gas stove, no flush toilet and no water in the house.

There was very little in the way of a garden, but opposite was an area that had been more cottages - it now belonged to a local farmer who let me have it for the sum of one pound a year.

It was covered with weeds and the hedges were over-grown and there was a pear tree badly in need of a prune, but it was the wrong time of year, so this had to wait.

With the help of my father we cut the hedges back and ploughed the ground, we then planted potatoes, the rows wider apart than usual and in between we planted cabbages.

Vegetables for all the Family and More

I supplied everyone in both extended families with potatoes and cabbages that year, with excess going to one of Anne's uncles who ran a green-grocers shop.

With the family growing, we started to look for a larger house - this was helped by a win of five hundred pounds on the Irish Sweep Stake, a fortune!

We moved to Lingfield which had a much smaller garden which was taken up by the children's paddling pool and flowers - vegetables came from Anne's father's allotment.

My time was taken up with working or racing motorbikes.

Moving to Australia

1968 we came to Australia and had to forget everything we had learned and start all over again.

We moved into Halsey Road, Elizabeth, a Housing Trust house with a very large garden - much lawn, three trees, one was a very sour orange, another was a Greengage which made lovely jam, the other we had no idea - it looked like a peach, but the skin was smooth and it was as hard as a bullet - it turned out to be a nectarine.

We tried to grow a few vegetables, but the ground was like concrete in the summer and glue in the winter.

The Clayton Garden

1973 we bought a block of land at Clayton - can not say it was bare as it was covered with horehound which the Council said had to be destroyed, so we set about pulling it up and burning it.

We marked out where we wanted to put the house and as soil is of a premium at Clayton, we removed every scrape from the house site.

Many people wondered where we lived as there was a vegetable garden and no house, or only one which was slowly growing as we built it weekends.

When we moved in permanently we brought a mulberry tree with us, carting it in a large trailer at night which was kinder on the tree - and it grew!

We now have two apricots - one early, one late, two peaches - both self sown - they came up out of the compost of which we make lots - we also have a Eureka lemon which produces twelve months of the year.

Our fig tree was a prize from the raffle table at Garden Club and is now producing a nice crop.

We also grow strawberries, raspberries and rhubarb, together with most of the vegetables we need.

Giving Brussels Sprouts a go

We keep trying to prove the 'experts' wrong when they say you cannot grow a certain plant in that area, like scarlet runner beans - we have a good crop again this year - when it is hot we cover them with shade cloth and keep them well watered.

We are going to give Brussels sprouts one more go this year - they should grow, it gets cold enough - we'll see!