

Ernest Dunckley and Frank Malthouse

Frank Malthouse and **Ernest Dunckley** were at the heart of the congregation when I arrived at St Nicholas in 1971. Both of them were serving the church with devotion: Frank as people's warden, assistant treasurer and long-standing member of the choir; Ernest as a welcoming sidesman and one of the select band of men (no women then !) who read the lessons.

In February 2006 they died, within a week of each other, Frank aged 85 and Ernest 96. With their passing an era ended in the life of our fellowship.

Ernest unfailingly kind, concerned and courteous, was also delightfully gallant. I relished the way he raised his hat to me, as I clanked past him along the High Road on my rattly old bike. He grew up with his brothers and half siblings in Chiswick, where his father remarried after Ernest's mother died when he was three. He qualified as a chartered surveyor, but the outbreak of war interrupted his career. He joined the army, serving in Africa, India and Burma, where he was recommended for the Burma Star. Married at the start of the war, when on four days' leave, he was not to see his wife for five years – frequent letters nurtured the relationship.

Children arrived after the war, and Ernest's connection with St Nicholas began when he and his family moved first to Eyot Gardens and then to the house in Airedale Avenue where he lived for the rest of his life. It's only now that I have learned from his daughter, Rosie Coleman, that Ernest, that distinguished-looking gentleman I used to wave to as he waited at the bus stop, was on his way to Queensway. There, after years as the estate manager for Whiteleys, he opened his own estate agency, which he ran until he retired at 75.

'What a handsome man your grandfather was, and such a snappy dresser,' I found myself saying to his grand daughter, Eva 'Oh, yes, wasn't he,' she agreed, clearly devoted to him, 'and so independent right to the end.' At his funeral his grandson, Jamie, sounded the trumpet for him with 'There'll never be another you'. How Ernest would have loved it.

At **Frank's** funeral a few days later, we heard from his family of his childhood in Hammersmith, in the parish of S John's, where his lifelong and unswerving faith was grounded; of his being a Boy Scout, of his bus rides all over London, and of his passion for music, cricket, football, art and, later, horticulture. We heard of Frank as a family man, devoted to his wife Freda (who died in 1980) and daughter, Mary, and of his work as a consummate administrator, with an enduring, dry wit.

At St Nicholas Frank has always reliably been there – as churchwarden, assistant treasurer, backbone of the choir, server for many years at the Friday morning mass, and in earlier days member of the Church of England Men's Society and parish rep for the Bible Reading Fellowship. Unruffled, equable and reticent, he performed his tasks meticulously - carrying the cross at the head of the procession, singing the choir solos, doing the rounds of the money boxes after Parish Mass, riding the bus to the bank on Monday mornings carrying the Sunday collections. As church warden he served for a considerable number of years, many alongside Stanley Collinwood. For two of them, when Stanley retired after 25 years in the job (people had stamina in those days), he coped with me as fellow warden. Although I was young, ignorant and completely uninterested in the church's fabric or its finances (matters which are the responsibility of the wardens) Frank's tolerance and forbearance were paramount. He only once lost his cool with me !

Frank's steadfast kindness and generosity were evident right through his life, towards his family, his grandsons and his great grand-daughter, and then also in the companionship which he and Elisa Mandarino shared for many years until his death, and in the loving support he afforded to her daughters

and grand-daughter. Frank could surprise too: it was only twenty years ago that he learnt to drive. Suddenly there he was nipping about in a smart little car, the means for visiting his daughter and for the many expeditions he and Elisa enjoyed together. He thoroughly enjoyed his retirement years.

We at St Nicholas salute Frank and Ernest. We miss them and are the poorer for their passing.

Christabel Ames-Lewis.