

# OBITUARY

## PHILLIP CLACK

Much loved villager PHILLIP CLACK of Alexandra Road passed away on 12 December 2011 at the Peace Hospice in Watford after losing his battle against cancer. A well attended funeral service and internment took place at Holy Cross on the 20 December.

Phillip was born on 11 July 1932 in Church Lane to what would become a family of TEN siblings (8 boys, 2 girls), of which only two now survive; brothers Tom and Raymond. A Sarratt resident virtually all of his life, he met his wife to be, Jill of Micklefield, whilst travelling to work at a farm in Loudwater. They married in 1957 and thus celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary 4 years ago. Much of his working life was spent working on highway maintenance for the Herts County Council, but Phillip had another labour of love (see Angela Colman's piece re his dedication to Sarratt Mill).

Phillip loved the village life and was heavily involved in the local community; helping to organise coach holidays and weekly bingo sessions at the Ex-Serviceman's Club / Village Hall. In healthier years he was also a keen supporter of Watford Football Club, regularly attending matches with son Christopher and providing transport to other followers from the village

He is survived by his wife, son and doting grandsons Daniel & Joshua.

Any outstanding donations are requested to be sent to The Peace Hospice.

**Christopher Clack**

### **Sad Note from Sarratt Mill. In Memory of PHILLIP CLACK**

When, over a quarter of a century ago, we came to live in Sarratt Mill as the legal owners and guardians of this exquisite, historic but fragile part of the Chess Valley, on our very first dreamy June morning full of birdsong, buttercups and daises, the irate owners of properties downstream in Loudwater came driving up to the house shouting that we had drained the river and caused mud to contaminate their carefully mowed lawns. We were baffled, concerned and ignorant of any such 'riparian' matters. But with the house, the grounds, the ten fan-tail doves, the wild black barn-cat and the lone guinea fowl, had come the true guardian of Sarratt Mill and his beloved River, Phillip Clack.

For over 50 years, day in, day out, whatever his other working

hours, Phillip came down to control the river levels, check the riverbanks, guard the habitats of the swans, their cygnets, the kingfishers, little-owls, sheltering pheasants, woodpeckers, wild flowers and vulnerable trees. The owners of the Mill House might change, but Phillip would always know who had stood fishing in the long grass or on the island, where a fox or a boy had squeezed under the fence, who had sat and picnicked in the woods. Never happier than when driving a series of different tractors over the years, he would halt in the long grass to save a single stray cowslip, or a group of ox eye daisies. But his greatest skill was in maintaining and rebuilding the river banks, year after year, making innovative use of the local materials at hand

Phillip was one of the dwindling band of men who grew up in truly rural Sarratt. A younger member of a large family of brothers and sisters, he went to the village school, but would always say that country work and larking about with his friends were more in his line. He told us that, when he was just a lad, he used to collect Lord Dudley's cattle and bring them to graze on the Green. He sometimes went to the dairy in what is now the smart side wing of Goldingtons, to collect milk. And he and his friend Roy Elbourne, would love driving the old open tractors on the lanes, but whether the farmer knew or not was never clear.

He and the other village lads learnt to swim just upstream of the Mill and his first contact with the Mill's inhabitants was when he and the other young Sarratt boys came and teased the Duke of Bedford's evacuee children through the railings. Later, after his marriage to his beloved wife Jill (a local girl whose father was gardener at one of the big Clutterbuck houses) they actually lived, to his delight, in the bungalow in the Sarratt Mill grounds. Their son, Christopher, spent much of his childhood helping Phillip down here, and Christopher's two sons Daniel and Joshua were always happy riding on the tractor, swimming or just racing round the grounds with their granddad.

Phillip was still determined and able to sit on that tractor and 'instruct' John Empson, his friend and workmate, until only two weeks before he died, just before Christmas. For us and our children he will always be here in spirit and it will be hard for me not to make his daily cup of tea with four sugars and several biscuits. The River will go on flowing through the sluices and over the weirs but no-one can take the place of Phillip in his woolly hat or straw panama and pheasant's feather, for whom Sarratt Mill and this stretch of the River Chess was a way of life. For us he was always part of 'home'.

**Angela Colman**