

Cousin Ken and artistic genes

It must have been in the summer of 1931 or 2; I would have been 11 or 12. We were on holiday at Sandown, in the Isle of Wight – my mother, father, my sister Gladys and me. Sandown was a place ideal for beach cricket (a favourite family game because when the tide went out hundreds of yards of hard smooth sand was exposed).

One day on that particular holiday we were walking on Keats Green, high on the cliff road to Lake and Shanklin, when we saw a tall upright policeman coming towards us. My father said to my mother “I think that policeman is my cousin, Bert Turner. He was a Grenadier Guard and he and I were good friends during the Great War. I heard he had joined the police force in the Isle of Wight.” “Well”, said my mother (the accepted brains of our family thanks to an innate amiability that my father possessed) “you won’t find out unless you ask him”. My father (grateful as ever for her infallible advice) approached the policeman gingerly and said “Excuse me, do you know a policeman named Bert Turner?” The tall military-looking policeman replied “indeed I do – and I know an old sailor called Ernie Cooper”. The two men literally fell upon each other with handshakes and further reminiscences about wartime experiences since they last met.

The recollection of these two cousins (my father and Uncle Bert Turner) which appealed most to my sense of humour was of several occasions in the Great War when my grandfather, Henry Francis Cooper, invited them to drinks at the local pub. When they got there the old rascal had ‘forgotten to take his wallet’ and the two young men were left to pay the bill.

Later that day when Bert Turner’s duty period finished that afternoon he called at our lodgings and collected all four of us and took us to his house-cum-police-station in Sandown where we met his wife and son. There were introductions and their family rapidly became Uncle Bert, Auntie Ivy and cousin Ken. We met often. The Turners paid us visits in Wembley and we returned the compliment by visiting them in Sandown. Once or twice when they were with us in Wembley we took them to Wembley Stadium where we watched a speedway meeting. I still have among my souvenirs some sketches that Uncle Bert penned at the speedway meeting. When we visited them in Sandown I saw some of Uncle Bert’s paintings of lifeboats which the RNLI had commissioned him to paint and who sold or auctioned them.

We and the Turners stayed loosely in contact and that many years later, when we moved to Pewsey in Wiltshire, the first people to welcome us to the county were cousin Ken and his wife Ena. They came to several parties we held in our Pewsey House and garden. Then sadly Ena died. Dorothy and I attended her funeral and decided that the Kingsdown Crematorium would be our choice for ourselves when the day came. The day did come up when Dorothy lost her fight with Alzheimer’s on 27 January 2007. By that time Dorothy was 87, she and I had been friends for nearly 70 years and married to each other for nearly 64 years. (It is interesting to reflect that when Dorothy was born in 1919 her parents were advised that owing to her heart condition she was unlikely to survive long and that her life should be insured for £15 – the going premium for a young child’s funeral in those days.)

My love of drawing and painting has been a feature throughout my life and continued of our move here Stanton Lodge. It has been good to know that somewhere in the Cooper family there has been an artistic gene which has flourished for generations in our family. It is my pleasure to know that the gene has passed to my daughter Diana and her daughter

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Beth, and to my granddaughter Holly (she is very talented and – like her parents – capable of many artistic traits).