

In My Own Words



Cover photograph courtesy of Pat Haddrell

by

John Devereux

“In My Own Words” evolved out of times shared in front of Johnny’s coal fire when his recollections were freely given and very much enjoyed. Then one day at the beginning of 2007 he asked if I would write his story. It has been a pleasure and a privilege.”

Pamela Vass
May 2008

This little book contains the recollections of one man who lived through most of the 20th Century. This was a time of great change in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent migration of labour from the rural areas to the towns and cities. The Great War had scythed a swath of death and destruction through Europe's nations and their populations in the early part of the century, dramatic events that had left rural England reeling from the loss of its manhood. Many working class families still living in the countryside at the beginning of the 20th Century invariably did so under primitive and harsh conditions and it was into such a deprived environment that John Devereux was born and grew up. His story, recounted here, "*in his own words*" is a record of life as it was experienced for many people of that time and culminates in his death at 92 in 2008.

He tells of the mean and cramped living conditions that were the lot of many farm workers of that era. He speaks of the iniquitous tied cottage system which permitted landowners to control the lives of their workers. His position as the eldest in his family was soon to be severely tried when his mother became confined to an asylum and his father tragically killed in a freak accident.

When World War II came and repeated the carnage experienced in the Great War in a more sophisticated and technologically advanced manner, John finds himself a soldier. He recalls how fortune in the form of his footballing skills saved him from the front line but then conspired to thrust him into the jaws of danger closer to home. He reflects on his years in the Bomb Disposal Squad of the Royal Engineers and readers cannot help to be astonished at his ability to survive in an occupation where life expectancy was measured in months. His comment "...I carried me football boots to war..." does little to communicate just how significant they were in moulding his life at that time.

With the war over, like many of his contemporaries, John struggles to make his way in civilian life but flourishes on meeting and marrying his wife Renee. Their life, whilst hard was happy, their stoicism, determination and hard work enabling them to build a simple, if not comfortable home together. John tells of his working and playing life with charming candor using a unique vernacular, being the combination of Herefordshire and Devonshire dialect. Where possible this has been reflected in Pamela Vass's transcription of his words. He speaks of his work in support of the village that became his home and which he loved so dearly, Littleham in North Devonshire, England.

In conclusion John frankly recalls the desperate times of his wife Renee's decline and subsequent death. He speaks freely of this experience and his feelings and once more the reader appreciates the rectitude that has carried John through all of the other adversities that attended his life. Although not apparently ill at the time, his words that complete the final paragraph of his recollections "... The story have ended..." were strangely prophetic, as he died not long afterward.

For those who believe they knew him, this story may still contain surprises, for those who didn't, it is a fascinating and candid reflection of a life and times slowly receding into history.

David Hogan - Editor - May 2008.

Details of the second printing:

50 copies of this book were printed in May 2008, which it was thought would be adequate, however, since then there has been a steady stream of requests for more copies. There are now sufficient orders in the pipeline to justify another print run and this will take place at the end of August 2009. This second printing will also be a second edition with some additional material and illustrations.

Please contact the publishers at the following address to reserve a copy. The price is £3.00 plus postage and packing of £1.00 which just covers the costs of materials.

Publishers:

Boundstone Books
Little Boundstone
Church Lane
Littleham
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Tel: 01237 425759

The publisher can also be contacted by email via the “Contacts” section of the Littleham & Landcross Community Web Site at:

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