

Arthur (Lefty) Cooper

Arthur (Lefty) Cooper was born in 1877 and married Florence Alice Crampin in 1902. They had four children Arthur (young Lefty), Henry, Florence and Miriam and lived at St John's Cottages, 32 St John's Road (New Town), Great Wakering.

He had been brought up in one of the huts which were the brick maker's homes near Millhead. Due to a general shortage of work locally Lefty Cooper was by necessity an opportunist having worked on the barges, been a Rag and Bone man and latterly the local horse slaughterer for whom he was better known. During the Second World War he enlisted as a Special Constable working alongside the full time Police Constables. (A group picture taken at the time is available elsewhere on the website).

Horses were a common form of transport being used by the Police and most farmers used them to work the land. There was also an Army Barracks at Shoebury Garrison where soldiers were trained to ride and use horses for pulling gun carriages and other loads during times of war. It was not unusual during training exercises to see the horses paraded through Shoebury and Great Wakering High Street pulling the various weaponry of the time.

When there was sufficient work he would enlist the help of his sons, Arthur and Henry and later Henry's son Raymond to help with the movement of the dead horses. He was one of the first people in the District to own a humane killer. Lefty had a yard and stables in New Town about half way up on the east side where he kept two horses, a cart for transporting the dead horses and a trap for general use. He also had a number of chickens which had free range of the yard. The slaughter house which he used was on the left hand side of the road a few hundred yards past the Landwick Police gate at the end of New Road on the way to Foulness Island.

He was very fond of dogs and for a number of years he owned greyhounds which he would race, successfully on a number of occasions, at Southend and Romford Greyhound Stadiums. The family still have some of the trophies which he won including a tea pot and sugar bowl which were presented to him for winning the Orsett Coursing Cup with a dog called Davids Day. A book recording these details is also held by the family.

Lefty and Florence's home in New Town was a modest semi-detached cottage with two bedrooms and an outside toilet. Lighting was provided by gas lights and before that candles and heat by coal fires. There was a large cabinet in the living room where he kept some stuffed birds and other small animals. He was also the proud owner of one of the earliest telephones to be installed in the village which was situated above his favourite chair in the living room. Also within easy reach was his radio powered by a large accumulator battery and his table where he kept his day to day paperwork for the business.

Below is an extract from an article written by John Threadgold, a local farmer, regarding the part played by Arthur's son Henry and his son Raymond following the 1953 floods. "After about three weeks all the dead animals were outside. We were quite fortunate in having a knackerman with a couple of horses and a slaughterhouse, less than half a mile from the farm buildings. Henry Cooper with his young son

Raymond who was just able to ride a horse pulled all the bodies through the now shallow water by the farm, to almost dry land on one of the meadows about half way to their slaughterhouse. Over the next week or so the animals were taken the last few hundred yards to the slaughterhouse and cut up for the pet food trade. Henry Cooper said that they were as fresh as if they had just been slaughtered, obviously the result of being pickled in salt water for over three weeks. The slaughterhouse was next to the sewage works and adjacent to a large piggery that belonged to Harold Taylor, a butcher from Southend”.

Lefty’s wife Florence Alice died in 1952 aged 74 years and Lefty died in 1963 aged 85 years and are both buried in Great Wakering Churchyard.

The photographs are of Florence Alice Crampin aged 17 in 1894 (Florence married Arthur Cooper in 1902), Arthur Cooper and his dog on his first knackers cart outside his home at 32 St Johns Road, Great Wakering in about 1910, Arthur Cooper on his cart at Bournes Green, Thorpe Bay in the 1940s and Raymond, Henry and Arthur Cooper on his cart at The Essex Show in 1946. Note: a sign saying A Cooper horse slaughterer and a royal crest on the side of the cart.