



Local History Collection

23 - The Fowerakers of Garracool, Coningsby La, Fifield

Summer 2024

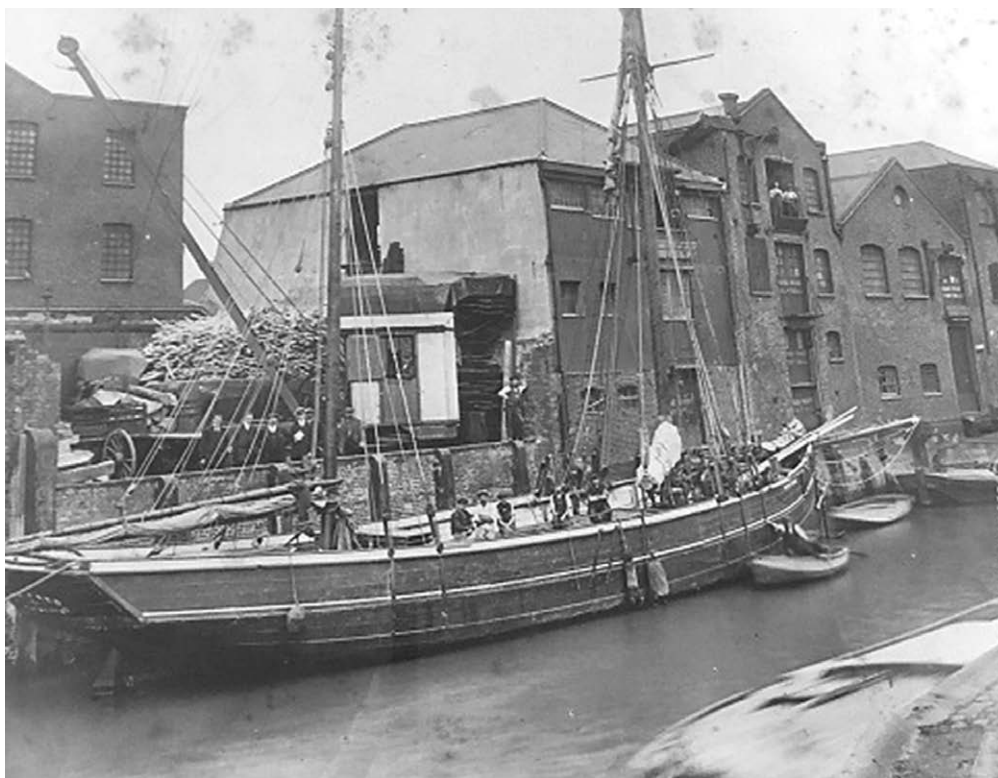
Researched & written by Sarah Grace

For a few years I had heard the name 'Fairacre' mentioned by several residents as a family who lived in Coningsby Lane in a small bungalow that had a dormitory style 'hut' for boys from London. To be remembered so many years after they had left the village was worth investigating further.



Frank Samuel Foweraker

Frank Samuel Foweraker was born in 1926 in Poplar, East London, to parents who ran a boarding house for stage acts at the Queen's Theatre and Frank helped out doing odd jobs. The family home was bombed during the blitz and Frank moved with his family (except his Father) to Devon where he developed his skills with firearms (catching rabbits and moles for their skins) and learnt about nature as a farm worker and lumberjack. Frank received his call up 6 days after his 18th birthday in June 1944 and served in the Middlesex Machine Gun Corps. (Frank had experience of firearms as he was involved with the Air Training Corps at 16 and Home Guard at 17) and was sent to Malta (where he walked the entire coast in a week of army leave) at the end of the war and then Italy. After demob, Frank worked on a farm and then as a crane driver at the shipyard, his Dad was given a pre-fab on the Isle Of Dogs where he also worked in the shipyard.



1920s - a wharf in the Isle of Dogs

There was also a rifle range attached to the shipyard where Frank won the competition cup. Frank heard about a Youth Club on the Isle of Dogs called the Dockland Settlement Club (whose patron was the Dowager Queen Mary) which was the idea of two officers recuperating from their wounds at the end of WW1 who had been impressed by the tenacity and courage of the men who they had served with from the Dockland area.

This club welcomed boys and girls and they had an army cadet corps that shot on a territorial range. Frank offered his services and started coaching the cadets.

This Dockland Settlement Club owned a one acre plot in Fifield that was used as a holiday centre for disadvantaged children from the East End. Every Easter weekend the older members of the club would travel to Fifield to prepare the bungalow and land. On this plot were 2 bungalows, one built in Victorian times, of corrugated iron with two bedrooms and a large living room, the other bungalow was wooden and was joined on by a short passage. Outside was another long wooden building which was divided into the fuel shed, a loose box, originally to house the pony and trap, and a long matchboard-lined outdoor playroom (in Edwardian times) - which had been converted to a bunk room with 8 iron double bunks. This plot was known as Garracool (today this plot is known as The Mulberrys).



Rear of Garracool showing both bungalows and veg gardens



***Win & Frank
1952-53***

Frank noticed that several maintenance jobs needed to be done and got a donation of red paint to re-paint the bungalow roof. This was now 1949 and Frank had met a girl called Win (born 1930 on the Isle Of Dogs) at the Settlement club where she sang in the choir and produced the Dockland Settlement magazine. After a long courtship they married in March 1953.

Frank was able to book Garracool for a family holiday in August that year. The bungalows were surrounded by lawns, with dwarf apple trees and a damson tree nearer the buildings, as well as the ancient, vast, Mulberry tree that the wooden bungalow had been built right up close to. At the back were what had been vegetable plots and a very large orchard with, mainly, pear trees, a few cooking apple trees and a large walnut tree and a wide concrete track alongside to enable any transport to get access to collect any crashed planes from the Maidenhead Aerodrome on the hundred acre field that started at Garracool and ended just short of the Windsor to Maidenhead A308 road (see history of the airfield on the OGAFCAs website **16** Autumn 2022 and **17** Winter 2023).

By March 1954 the new Dockland Settlement Warden asked Frank if he'd consider living at Garracool, paying enough rent to cover the rates but ensuring that the maintenance was completed (many years later Frank and Win were able to buy Garracool when the Docklands Settlement Club charity was being wound up). Frank accepted this idea and managed to find a job at Vandervells in Cox Green to which he would cycle each day. Their Daughter Ann, named after Annie Oakley from the musical 'Annie get your gun', was born at Garracool in April.



Ann with Leo on the front lawn



Mark with a competition entry

Later, Win and Frank were able to enjoy many a Saturday evening at the Hare and Hounds pub with Ann in the carrycot in the pub kitchen fast asleep. Their son Mark was born in 1957 named after Marksman. That way they met many local market gardeners and small farmers including Harry Jacob from Coningsby Farm. It was Harry Jacob that then went on to supply Frank with cow dung for his vegetable beds and in return Frank helped with odd jobs and at calving time. This vegetable patch, along with Chinese Geese, rabbits, pigs and goats sustained the whole family. Many of the Chinese Geese were sold at Christmas time to his co-workers at the factory and Frank would cycle the 5 miles to work with the prepared geese in the basket of his trade bike ! Hazel the goat would join the family holidays to Cornwall !



The 100-egg flock of Chinese Geese



Hazel the goat with her 2 kids

They had plenty of apples, comfrey to feed the pigs and geese, pear trees, damson, walnut and a pair of almond trees. They made dried apples, salted runner beans, pickled onions, jams, country wines from hedgerow blackberries, damsons or rosehips, yoghurt. They also made soft, hard, and cottage cheese from the goats milk.

Rifle shooting was a big part of Frank's life and he joined the Maidenhead and District Rifle Club and all the family became competitive shots. Frank coached at the club and eventually reached Captain and Win the Secretary. Frank was part of the 'English 20' team and he won the King's Trophy Medal at Bisley for full bore shooting. He also became a firearms dealer and with his springer spaniel Teal would be invited on commercial shoots as a beater, he'd also help local farmers keep the fox population under control as well as pigeons. When the MDRC club had to relocate it was Frank who designed, got involved with planning applications and help build and fundraise for the new club which was opened in 1967.

In Mr. Jacob's field next to Garracool was a spring fed pond which Frank got permission to stock with Tench, Roach and Carp for coarse fishing where he taught both Ann and Mark to fish. He was also a keen Archer, scuba diver in the Thames surveying and cataloguing finds upstream and downstream of Maidenhead bridge.

Frank left Vandervells in 1967 to work at King Edward V11 hospital as a member of the maintenance team, where he turned his hand to improving the equipment and maintenance of the building with his hands-on approach. He'd make specialist bits for hospital equipment that had broken. Win also took a higher education course and qualified to teach in Further Education, taking up a post teaching Typing and Office Practice at East Berks College in Windsor, until she retired. She was an active member of Braywood Women's Institute, taking the role of secretary and of president in her time, both in Fifield and later in Cornwall.

In 1988 Frank and Win sold Garracool to retire to Cornwall to live with their Daughter and son in law - and took their goats with them. Frank created a woodland garden and continued to keep animals and helped with the grandchildren. They celebrated their diamond anniversary in 2013, sadly Win was diagnosed with vascular dementia a few years before. Frank died from cancer in 2018, and a few months later Win passed away too.



Frank & Win - circa 1986



Frank & Win - Ruby Anniversary - 1993

Frank was a problem solver and enjoyed writing poetry, and always wrote one for Win's birthday and anniversary cards. On their 50th anniversary he wrote the following poem -

*My love that was like
A moorland stream,
Sparkling and bright
From where it rose,
Excitedly rushing over
Its bed of sunlight stones.
Now goes
Deeper and stronger
As, with age, it slows.*

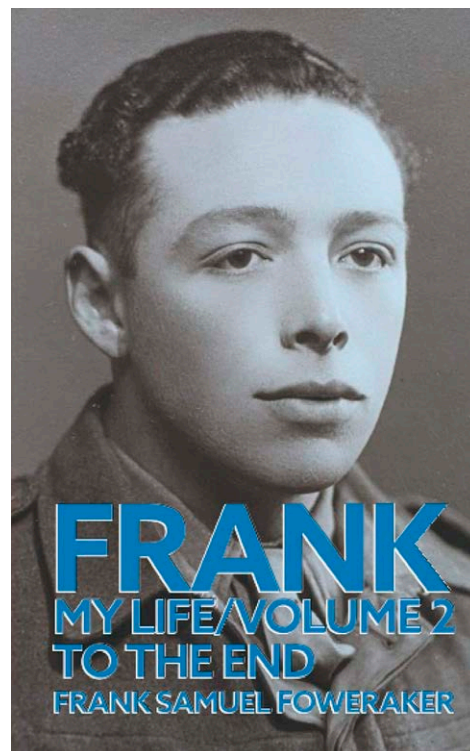
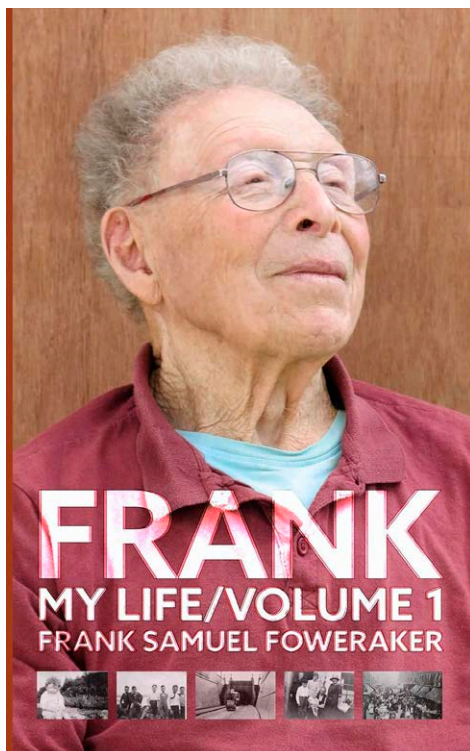
One of the loveliest comments written about Frank and Win, was written by Win's sister in law and brother in law, Peter and Judy, when they visited them in 1959 -

"At that time they lived in Fifield near Windsor, and we always looked forward to visiting and spending time with them all. It was such a warm and welcoming home where there were always so many interesting ventures going on, lots of conversations about all kinds of topics, and Win was a lovely cook and made us nice tasty meals and homemade bread to die for. Frank 'he was so knowledgeable about so much and loved nothing more than to discuss a topic and would always enjoy someone else's point of view, even if he might not agree with them! I so admired his artistic ability; he would have a go at anything".

I'd like to thank Ann Foweraker Murphy and her family who has proof read and edited my historical piece about her father, Frank, and for supplying the photos. There are more of these on the following pages.

Sarah Grace

Frank wrote 2 books if anyone is interested in reading more about his life. They are both available on Amazon - click on the images below.





Garracool - Corrugated-iron-clad bungalow



Frank with the pigs



Garracool - wooden-clad bungalow - Mulberry tree showing on right



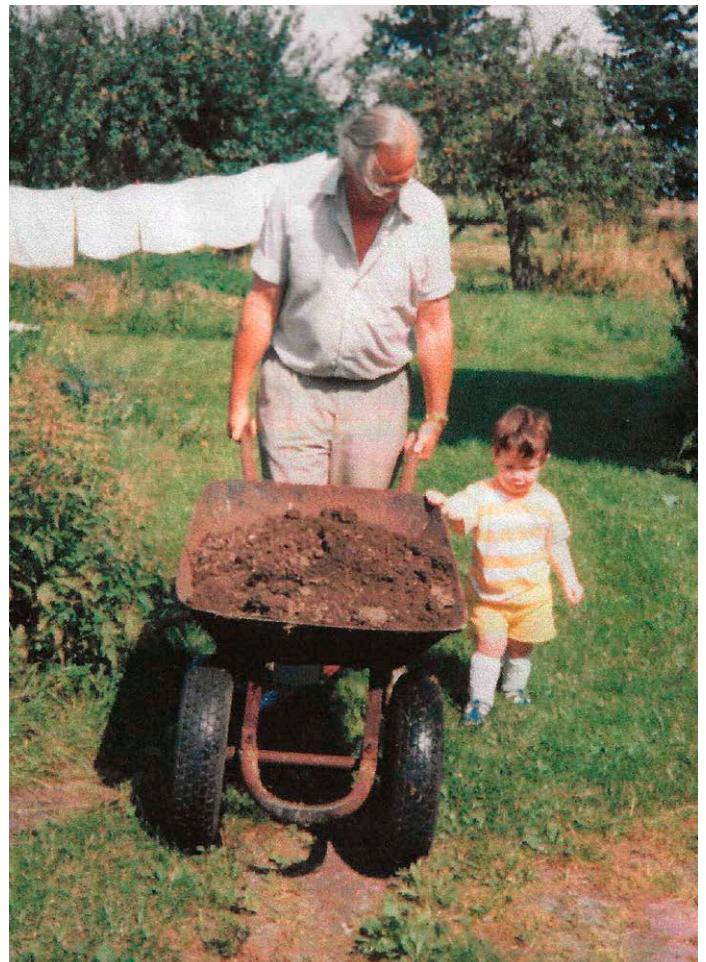
*view from wooden-clad bungalow
showing 'garage' and attached and beyond Bunk House*



Garracool - original corrugated iron bungalow in 1960s. Michael or Hugh McGeechan playing guitar to Mark Foweraker and friend Stuart (Mouse)



Son Mark with one of the dogs



Grandson "helping" Don Aitken



1988 - grandson Matthew at the front gate



End of year party - students on the lawn



Frank cutting a block of “lick” with nutrients for the goats



Mr Harry Jacob with “his” Robin