

Norfolkman Ken Mayhew celebrates his 100th birthday at Suffolk Golf Club

Ken Mayhew, veteran of the Normandy campaign, holder of the highest Dutch military award, a Knight of the Wilhelm Order, the Dutch equivalent of the VC, has had his stamina tested by a series of celebrations of his 100th birthday, which fell on January 18th.

The celebrations have included a family celebration at the College, a reception at the Dutch Embassy on February 16th, attended by the Ambassador and many other dignitaries, and then finally, a special lunch held at Woodbridge Golf Club, attended by some three dozen OFs and wives. Ken has been a fine sportsman, excelling at cricket and golf, and those present included many who had played these sports with and against him, and who had travelled considerable distances to pay their own tributes.

This gathering occurred in the week before the Ipswich/Norwich/Derby so it was a good time to remind ourselves not only of rivalries, but also of ties between our two counties. On his tactfully composed sporting cv, Ken includes youthful appearances for Suffolk at cricket, and Norfolk for hockey. Subsequently he played cricket, hockey and squash for Norfolk. He continued to play golf until well into his nineties, still carrying his own clubs. He has many Suffolk friends from his cricketing days, playing for the Old Framlinghamians against the Old Ipswichians, amongst others. Not only did the guests come from these two counties but they also came from Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Essex

Balancing things out, his "baby" brother, Jimmy, an ex-WW2 commando, and a mere 97 years old, lives in Suffolk, in Chelmondiston. Jimmy too, was present at the celebratory gathering. We celebrated Ken's birthday in Suffolk – and that perhaps excuses him from having been hugged by Delia at Carrow Road, where he is a season ticket holder. Modestly he had declined to go out on to the pitch to receive due acclaim.

OFs from across the country celebrated a true WW2 hero, and fine sportsman. He was advised, at the lunch, celebrating his innings of one hundred, not to give his wicket away cheaply, but to take fresh guard and aim for the second hundred. Not many people receive congratulatory 100th birthday greetings from two monarchs!

The following is a special grace Norman composed for the occasion :

We thank you God before we dine
For peace and friendship, food and wine
And as we eat this birthday meal
We pray our broken world you'll heal
Keep safe from tempest, fire and foe
Those now deployed, and those who'll go.
Bless those who once to war have been
While serving us, or friends and Queen.

Amen

The following is an edited summary of the tribute paid by Norman Porter, in the unavoidable absence of our President :

Thanks to you all for supporting this occasion. The turn-out speaks for itself. Most of us were still at the short trousers and pigtail stage - some not even at the uteral stage - when Ken was facing the greatest challenges of his life in 1944 onwards. We are consoled in being reminded that one of the great (if not the only!) advantages of old age is that peer pressure diminishes in inverse proportion to increasing age. If Ken's birthday were celebrated by his co-evals, (= same age, not partners in crime) there would be no-one here. It speaks volumes of the man that so many people, so much younger than himself, wish to pay tribute to the first 100 years of his life.

Apologies for absence: Chris Essex, Andrew Wright, James Ruddock-Broyd (who kindly sent photos from the Lunch at the Dutch Embassy); David Turnbull and David Mitchell.

This lunch is the **third strand of Ken's 100th birthday celebrations:**

The first strand: Family – it was very special that the family should have chosen the College as the venue in January – we know in what high regard Ken is held there, and I applaud Headmaster Paul Taylor for his total engagement in this wonderful Mayhew epic. It is great that we have half a dozen Mayhews here today – not all of the same family. It is particularly good to welcome Jimmy and Janice Mayhew – Jimmy is a mere 97, an ex-WW2 commando, also former member of this club. We have a small gift here, to spur him on towards his own personal 100th celebration.
(Presentation of token).



As we all know, and as Ken would be the first to acknowledge, Trish, his wife for the past 25 years, has been at his side and supporting him through these recent heady times. We have something for both of them –at the conclusion of these few words

Second strand: The Dutch: they discovered Ken as a Knight of the Order of Wilhelm in 2011 – they thought he was long since dead – he wasn't and isn't! There are only 4 knights left, so Ken is 25% of them. The Dutch Ambassador told us that this award is the equivalent of the VC. As a result Ken and Trish have been entertained by royalty – hence our own mini version of red carpet treatment. They have been regaled by and visited by Dutch ambassadors. The most recent occasion was on Thursday – a special 100th birthday at the Dutch Embassy, many uniforms, breasts bristling with medals – but despite that formality there shone through it all a real affection and admiration of someone who is genuinely considered to be a hero of the Dutch nation, and celebrated as such.

(A display showing the many aspects of Ken's career was available to be seen by guests)

So why are we here? That's the third strand:

We are here to celebrate Ken, the Framlinghamian and Ken, the Sportsman.

Ken started at Fram in 1929. He played for first teams in cricket, hockey and squash. Showing an early sense of inter-county tact, he represented county of Suffolk at cricket but played hockey for Norfolk.

It is something of a cliché to compare life to an innings at cricket. How often have we heard it said that "He's had a good innings." If someone hits a hundred though and is still playing on, it always merits special consideration, so I'm going to adapt the cliché.

Let me take you through the innings. With all due respect to Geoffrey Boycott, and the virtues of a carefully put together innings, that of Ken has been more in the manner of a Ted Dexter – imperious – but always gentlemanly – (Dexter was known as gentleman Ted):

The innings began on January 18th 1934. Early cricket, if there was any, was played in and around Ipswich. Ken was born near Ipswich and actually worked for Fisons before the war. The first flourishes of a burgeoning cricketer were shown at the College, where he played for the first team. Perhaps the most challenging point of his life's innings came in his late 20s - those war years, when metaphorically speaking, Ken could so easily have been run out by a Germanic non-cricketer at the other end. Mercifully he wasn't and Ken survived to put together the rest of this wonderful innings.

After the war, more conventional cricket was played. Sport has been a central part of Ken's life. He played many matches for the OFs against the OIs and formed lasting friendships. He is the spirit of cricket incarnate. He also played and enjoyed golf. It was legendary that he was carrying his own bag until he was 98. The nervous nineties weren't really nervous at all. He took on challenges that would daunt many others younger

than himself. He went to Australia for an Ashes series. He made and makes frequent visits to Lords – not to play, but to enjoy watching cricket and meeting friends – including many OFs. These were signs of still lusty engagement in life's game. Maybe he is now limited to taking short, leisurely, possibly painful singles, but he's made his hundred, and can reflect back on it with pride. A great and unfinished innings.

Conclusion:

The Dutch seem to know as much about Ken as we do, so I will pick out two qualities mentioned by the Ambassador on Thursday: the first was modesty – if only some of our pseudo-celebrities nowadays could show more of that! And the second was his being a perfect role model for younger people. As younger Framlinghamians – and that includes all of us – we, and those leaving Framingham, could not have a better example of a life well led – one that can and should inspire all those who know and admire you. You can wave your bat towards the pavilion with pride – the century celebrations must have tested your stamina. Major Kenneth Mayhew – Don't give your wicket away easily. It is time to take fresh guard and to move on to your double century. Ken - We salute you, soldier, sportsman, gentleman, gentle man - a Framlinghamian of whom we are all truly proud.

(A special token, courtesy of the OF Trustees, was presented to Ken and Trish)

The following attended the lunch:

Ken and Trish Mayhew, Chris and Liz Sneath, Mike and Sheila Spencer, Dudley and Jackie Holland Norman and Margaret Mayhew, John Edwards, Ted Edwards, John and Angela Rankin, Richard and Georgina Sayer, John and Jill Kerr, Norman and Virginia Porter, John and Peggy Thurlow, Rob and Anna Smith, Peter Howard-Dobson, Stephanie and Roger Askew, Colin Wigg , Jimmy and Janice Mayhew, Paul Wright.

