

RALPH WHITLOCK 1914-1995

Listed in the clippings section of this issue are two items advising the passing of one of the best known and loved Whitlocks, Ralph Whitlock of Winterslow, Wiltshire. Ralph died October 22, 1995.

My association with Ralph goes back to 1967 prior to commencing my research into the Whitlock family. I was 17 and saw Ralph's name in *The Field* magazine and decided to write to him and ask what he knew about the origins of the Whitlock family. I still have his reply of July 24, 1967. Ralph's support and encouragement is what led to my interest in family history and thus eventually to the Whitlock Family Association.

At age 16 Ralph started writing about Pitton village events for the local paper and by 1932 was writing a weekly column of country notes for the Western Gazette group. This continued unbroken well into the 1990's, over 60 years. His first article in *The Field* was in 1944 and he was their farm editor for more than 30 years. By 1945 he had a spot on the BBC radio and was soon in demand as a commentator on agricultural and rural issues. He also had a regular spot on Children's Hour which later moved to television.

From 1968 to 1973 Ralph worked as the agricultural consultant to the Methodist Missionary Society and this took him to places such as Africa, India and the Caribbean. His talks on how to grow more food with what you have available were full of practical rural-sense ideas. I still use his idea of planting potatoes at the bottom of a barrel and slowly filling it with earth as the plant grows. You end up with potatoes all the way up the stocks!!

Ralph wrote once asking my wife and I what we thought of his emigrating to America when he retired as his son lived near us in British Columbia and he had a daughter in Los Angeles. After considerable thought we wrote back and advised against leaving England. While he and his wife, Hilda might have a bit easier time in America his whole life had been built around the English country experience. We felt he would miss it terribly and as his income was derived from his writing the opportunities would surely diminish as it became known he lived in America.

Ralph and Hilda settled near Salisbury in Winterslow, a few miles from Pitton where he was born. We visited them there several years ago when our daughter, Meghan was still quite young. Ralph showed us into the sitting room and Meghan noticed the floor to ceiling bookcase by the door that Ralph said were his books. "My Dad has lots of books, too" Meghan told Ralph. The difference of course was that Ralph had written everyone of them, over 100.

While Ralph was sad to see the countryside change he was not nostalgic for the past. The days of the Corn Laws, Enclosures, oppressive Game Laws and agricultural depression were clearly understood by Ralph and he was happy to see the village of his youth a vibrant and alive place, albeit a vastly different one.

Ralph will be missed by all those who came to know him. His legacy will be the vast record of rural history he set down for both present and coming generations to look back on. He has left us an open window through which we will forever be able to see the day to day lives of our ancestors.