

WE'RE COMING HOME TO HALLOW

Have you reached that age when you think it's about time you de-cluttered and down-sized? It can be daunting finding a new home for grandma's precious vase or aunty's antique table, so how would you cope with thousands of military memorabilia ranging from the cockpit of a Canberra bomber, aircraft engines, ejector seats, a spy plane drone used in the Iraq war, bullets, bombs, folding wartime bicycles down to a huge collection of wartime household items and farming antiques?

Yes, many of you will know, at this point, that I am talking about Pat and John Hancocks who decided in their mid-eighties that it was 'time' and have spent the last few heart-wrenching months selling up their amazing and beloved collection. John's fascination with militaria began as a child in Birmingham during the Second World War and was fuelled by his time doing National Service serving as a crash salvager in the RAF. John's hobby soon became an obsession, but he felt that he had reached the point when he could go no further and it was time to share his collection with other people. Even though John and Pat have, over the past 20 years, invited many visitors to view what was described as the best private collection in the country, raising over £4,000 from donations for the Air Ambulance in the process.



John and Pat in front of the Canberra cockpit Part of their collection of engines and missiles

Their five bedroomed farmhouse, 50 acres, barns and outbuildings have also been sold and they are thrilled to be 'coming home' to a bungalow with a small garden in Hallow.

Pat was born in Birmingham in 1932 to Raymond and Kate Eggleton. Following a promotion Ray moved the family, Kate, Pat and sister Mavis to a new house on the main road in Hallow just before Moseley Turn. Ray soon became a village stalwart, serving on the Parish Council, as a school governor, joining local sports clubs and becoming inspector to Hallow's Special Constables. Kate too immersed herself in village life and was a onetime president of the W.I. The family was complete after the arrival of a son Tony and another daughter Lorraine.

The children went to Hallow School and days were spent cycling, to Claines gymkhana, swimming in Grimley Lido or to Cotheridge grass track. Summer holidays at Slimbridge with Great Aunty Beat, now Peter Scott's Bird Sanctuary, were a great treat. A favourite place was Grimley, which was where some years later, Pat met a dark haired boy called John, his grandparents had a bungalow by the Camp. The cycling soon ceased as John had a two seater M.G. and romance blossomed.



Pat worked at Gertrude Mitchells in Worcester and always struggled ironing her uniform; a brown linen dress with pale blue collar. She moved on to Jerimain, an up-market dress shop and later to the advertising department of Kays, even appearing as a model in the catalogue itself.



Pat as a young lady and right, Gertrude Mitchell's in the High St.

John was also born in Birmingham in 1930, his family had a garage, with little spare money and children made their own entertainment. He recalled buying a penny's worth of putty, which he could use as modelling clay, making various things – until it dried out! Chasing balls of mercury round the kitchen table was another pastime, a highly dangerous substance, but it doesn't seem to have done John any harm.

He remembers the bombing of the city and being taken by his father to see the devastation and the fires, one raid by 200 bombers lasted thirteen hours. The situation was getting serious and it was decided to send John to the countryside to friends they had made when visiting their bungalow by The Camp Inn. The family spent weekends and holidays there and being close to the River Severn time was spent fishing, bird nesting shooting and countryside pursuits in general. At 12 he went to live on a farm at Monkwood, but as there were so many evacuees and no room at Wichenford School he was put to work on the farm learning a variety of farming skills and shooting rabbits, which were usually served at dinner, roasted, stewed, boiled, fried or baked! About a year later he was moved to Greenhill Farm in order that he could finish his education at Hallow School.

John said he lived through a different age, his childhood was unhindered by today's rules and regulations, health and safety and other political correct ideas. He thinks children of his time were allowed to develop ideas and character that is not encouraged today.



John and Pat married in Hallow Church in 1954 and after a honeymoon with a group of friends in Torquay began life in a caravan at Rowley Farm. John managed the farm, then owned by his parents and with Pat's help raised cattle, sheep and two sons. In those days, John says, it was possible to support a family on 50 acres, these days diversity is almost a necessity.

At 65 John retired from farming and he and Pat spent the next few years travelling to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Thailand and Singapore with annual holidays taking in most of Europe, which included several visits to WW2 battlefields and war grave sites. He also learned to fly light aircraft.

Knowledge of all things military and their own wartime memories have been put to good use on many occasions, visiting schools to talk about life in wartime Britain, taking along interesting objects for children to handle, and also generously loaning artefacts for exhibitions staged by various history groups. Thank you both for the time and effort you have spent over the years in accumulating such a comprehensive and fascinating collection, it has informed and educated so many.

Pat and John are now deservedly looking forward to the next chapter in their lives, renewing old acquaintances and having visits from their three granddaughters and one grandson and maybe perhaps reflecting on their full and interesting past.

So pleased you have returned – welcome back.



*1933 John aged 3 with family
outside their business.*