

Maurice Norman

Spurs and England Footballer, husband and father



*The sign on Maurice and Jacqueline's Summer House, September 2018*

Recently, two people, independently of each other, suggested a possible subject for this Blog;

*"You should contact Maurice Norman. He played for England and Spurs. And, he lives in St. Martin's."*

they said forcefully, with a degree of pride and respect. I thought carefully, knowing he would indeed be an excellent man to meet and interview but wondered whether a such a famous footballer would consent to speak to me. One bright sunny morning when the weather was set to Fair, I woke up thinking "Today's the day" and almost on the spur of the moment decided to see what would happen. Equipping myself only with a Village Recorder business card, my diary and pencil, I set off hopefully to see if my would-be mission was possible. I found the house just off the High Road, away from the rumble of the traffic and almost invisible to the casual walker. A bold knock on the door was answered by Jo, the daughter of the house. I explained the focus of my cold call, assuring her my intentions were entirely benign and my nervous request was answered with warmth and friendliness. And thus, it came about that I arranged to meet a man the Postmen ask after by saying, "How's 'The Legend'?"

When I called again some days later, I was shown through the house to a long garden of lush and pleasing appearance.



*Part of the garden Maurice and Jacqueline created, September 2018*

Jo, her mother, Jacqueline and father, Maurice were basking in the sunshine in peaceful contemplation of their surroundings. Maurice shook my hand firmly as we greeted each other and his

wife invited me to sit down. Everyone chipped into the interview, each providing their own perspective of Maurice's career and in this context, what follows is more about his family and civilian life rather than his stellar career as a Footballer. It was Jo who kicked off her father's life story, telling me that even at the age of eighty plus years he still receives two or three letters a week from people around the world requesting his autograph, which is assuredly a testament to his place in the hearts of Spurs Fans; the fan base has always meant everything to Maurice. She also told me that on one occasion, a letter arrived addressed to, "The Spurs Legend" Maurice Norman', which is the origin of the title the Posties use when announcing mail deliveries. I mentioned I knew Maurice had been born and raised in Mulbarton, Norfolk and his eyes lit up as he asked if I knew the village. Clearly, it still occupies a special place in his heart. Mulbarton is placed between the A140 and the A11 and about 6 miles from Norwich. His father, Billy, was a Market Gardener and Jo said she remembers her grandparents who were quiet, lovely, country people. Maurice grew up more or less in the open countryside, because one of the key features of the village is the Common with its perimeter of nearly 7 miles. If you look on a map you can see the enormity of the land and the vast green space it still offers the villagers. Interestingly enough, one of the Bye laws says,

*"Do not discharge missiles (N.B. includes golf balls)"*

and I wondered where this would leave another young Maurice, because this was his initial training ground as a young lad. How many goals for England did he score on the Common and would they have been classed as discharged missiles?

*"What did you say you used for a football, Dad?" asked Jo with a slight smile and then, pre-empting his reply carried on, "It was a pig's bladder stuffed with newspaper, and he didn't have football boots. He put studs or maybe tacks in his shoes himself."*

In one breath, Jo had carried the listener back to the time when football was without rules, regulations, football boots or professional players. The simplicity of the equipment Maurice used could have placed him anytime in the last five hundred years. The game would have been devoid of any players' ambitions other than having a good, competitive game and in a quiet aside, Jacqueline said,

*"Business has ruined football."*

She said this without envy or desire and simply expressed sadness that the game which Maurice loved has become one driven by finance and many noughts before the decimal point.

Because for young Maurice, playing was undiluted pleasure and an automatic pastime whenever he was free. Even when he wasn't free, he was pulled by the urge to play football. He would climb out of his bedroom window, using one of the wall anchors as a step to reach the ground. Then he would be off to the common, playing solitary games of football and ignoring the call of school and other more

serious matters. He has said in more than one interview how he always knew he would play football and as I listened to him speak, I could see his driving force was a passion for the game. He had to give some consideration to earning a living and initially worked as a farm boy for a local farmer. He recalled the time when just he and the heavy horse he worked with saw bombs falling on Norwich during the War. As he grew into his teenage years, he honed his skills by playing for the local amateur team, Wymondham Minors, run by a Mr Barnard. Many young boys may dream of what happened next: at the age of 16 he was picked up by a Norwich City talent spotter and signed up to play for the Canaries. There were no cars to transport him to and from morning training in those days and if he missed the bus, he had to walk home and then make sure he fed the pigs. Glamour did not figure large in Maurice's life; he was paid just £20 a week. It was a different time for professional footballers. Jo expanded on the way Maurice has conducted his life,

*"Dad always worked hard. He didn't drink or smoke and he was always very athletic. He used to play tennis and other games with us when we were children. He only gave up using his leg weights four years ago when he reached the age of eighty!"*

After a comparatively short spell with Norwich City, Maurice was transferred to Tottenham Hotspur and this is when he demonstrated his superlative skills to their best. Jacqueline told me how the outstanding year for Maurice was 1961 when Spurs won the Championship and the F.A. Cup, adding that this was the first time the double had been achieved since 1896. It was an outstanding year for her as well because she married Maurice. She described the wedding with fond humour. The marriage took place in the family church of Northolt. Because the young couple feared the fans might get up to some high jinks, the wedding car wasn't left at the church in case the wheels or other essential motoring components were stolen. They entered the church with a handful of villagers outside but emerged to about five hundred people cheering them on, which wasn't quite what they had expected. That night, after the Reception, they went to their new home and in common with many other newly-weds, discovered they were famished, because people rarely eat fulsomely at their own reception. Jacqueline set her hand to cooking themselves something and Maurice switched on the television to be greeted with smiling images of themselves. Their marriage had made national news on both ITV and BBC, such was Maurice's fame.

During his time at Spurs, Maurice travelled the world and said he had met and played with many wonderful people, few of whom are still alive. By 1965, his career had plenty of mileage left in it; he was only thirty-one. But on 17<sup>th</sup> November, he broke his leg whilst playing. Nowadays, paramedics would apply neck braces, flexible foam splints and all that modern medical technology has to offer. In 1965, this was not available to Maurice; he was simply stretchered off. He spent the next year with his leg in plaster and eventually visited a doctor in Harley Street. The accident had left his leg 3" shorter than the other: his height was Six feet two and a half inches. The consultant prescribed breaking the leg again and re-setting it. At this point in the conversation, Maurice rolled up his trouser leg and revealed the visible scars on his leg with their fractured outline. Despite the surgical procedure his leg

was not sufficiently repaired and it wasn't possible to re-ignite his career. Professional football was over for Maurice. Nevertheless, domestic responsibilities did not go away and Maurice had to find work. He started off working an eight-hour day at a Murco petrol station. But then in 1969 he, Jacqueline and his two children moved to Frinton in Essex and at this point it was Jacqueline's creative talents which came to the fore. Always an expert knitter, Jacqueline was the main motivator when they opened a shop called "Needlewoman". Jo remembered living above the shop, which was perhaps her main childhood home. For the next fifteen years they sold yarns, needles and patterns, closing the shop in 1984 and moving to Wrentham. Their final move was to St. Martin's where they have remained ever since finding the village has a real community feel.

Jo spoke not only of her father's talent but also made sure her mother's skills were brought out into the open, speaking of them with pride and respect. Jacqueline is not just gifted in needlecraft but is also a talented artist. In 1997, she took 'A' level Art as a mature student, passing with an A star.

*"Art runs through the family." Jacqueline said modestly.*

She continues to paint creatively and evidence of her ability is all around the house and there is over spill storage in the Summer House, which is the Art Studio. The garden, with its abundant layout, is her creation. Incidentally, the Summer House also pays tribute to Maurice's career, as it sports a White Hart Lane plaque, which can be seen shyly peeping through the vines. This a household built upon the mutual love and respect of two parents who happily provided a secure and creative upbringing for their children. Jo explained,

*"It wasn't about living the high life or having an exotic lifestyle. It was about being in a caring and loving family. I've always been able to talk to our parents and even if they didn't agree with what was happening, they always supported me. We're a closely-knit group and Mum and Dad made sure they gave us our support. After nearly sixty years of marriage you can see the love is still there between them. Dad was always involved with us. He used to take me to Speedway, play tennis and other games. The grandchildren have made things with Mum and they used to take them on outings to historical places when they were younger. They loved it and said looking after the grandchildren was like having a second family. They now have two great-grandsons."*

Jo's own career, encouraged by her parents, has been varied. She started as a Registered General Nurse but then moved into education, becoming a Teaching Assistant who eventually specialised in Social Care and Protection. Latterly, she became a Carer for her parents as the exigencies of old age kicked in as they inevitably do, and has worked to ensure they live a happy and comfortable life.



Jo, in Maurice and Jacqueline's garden, September 2018

The interview drew to a close. Before I left, Jo showed me some of Maurice's photos and memorabilia which decorate the house in close juxtaposition to Jacqueline's art. On my way home, I reflected on the family I had just visited and was left with two main thoughts. One was the strength of the family love and affection I had witnessed. The other was the mental image of the world famous footballer as a young boy, shinning down the side of the house to play solitary football on the common. Money and fame didn't matter to him as he kicked a homemade ball with a carefree and joyful spirit, working hard to play as perfectly as he could. This was the boy who grew to become the man who put his heart and soul into creating a loving family.

Which is the greater legacy?



Maurice Norman at the height of his career. Courtesy of Maurice Norman