

The Honeybourne Hut

Franz and Elspeth Altwasser parents to Richard, who was part of the 4-man design team which built the Sinclair Zx81.

Franz was a navigator in a German bomber, shot down on it's way to Coventry. It was his first, and last raid, and as a prisoner of war he was sent to the Vale of Evesham to work on the land. Getting off the train at Honeybourne, his attention was immediately caught by the sight of the station managers granddaughter, helping out her gramps, due to the shortage of men. Her name was Elspeth, as he had heard someone call out and Franz knew he would have to bide his time, but he would like to get to know her better.

So he settled into life in the Vale, working in the fields, digging, hoeing and picking crops of sprouts and cabbages. Taking his time to learn English better, and try to be accepted by the locals. In what little spare time he had, he spent on carving pieces of wood, as he had been working for his own father before the war, training as a carpenter, and was a natural at understanding the properties and form of wood.

Franz noticed that the young courting couples all used the railwayman's hut in the station yard to meet up of an evening, where they could get to know each other better. This was in the days before youth clubs and discos, so anywhere out of the weather where young lovers could go was valued. The only problem was that the door couldn't be locked from the inside, and on a number of occasions youngsters had been rudely interrupted in their romance. Franz came up with an idea. He produced wooden carvings for each couple, of birds and flowers and such like, which could be placed in the window above the door to the hut, indicating it being in use, and by whom. This turned out to be a popular solution, greatly appreciated by the youth of the village. As for his own romantic aspirations, Franz had to wait further, as Elspeth had departed off to teacher training college, but he was a patient young man.

At the end of the war, Franz stayed on at Honeybourne. He had no real ambition to return to Germany, and felt his future was in the Vale, with Elspeth, as she had returned to teach in the local school. But he had wait yet again, as the government brought in legislation to prevent prisoners of war from associating with the locals. By this time, Franz's skills as a carpenter were in great demand, as some of the courting couples had married, and were looking for furniture for their new homes, and in due course, cribs and baby toys. So Franz was able to set up business in the village as a carpenter, an occupation he retained until his retirement.

It was 1955 before Franz and Elspeth were eventually married, and the following year Richard was born. If you visit the village of Honeybourne, you may well be able to see wooden carvings in the windows of a number of cottages, as reminders of the young lovers and the Honeyboune Hut.