

Old George and the Red Triangle

George had served in the British Army and seen active service in the Boer War. On leaving the army he returned to the farm on which he had been brought up, and as was the tradition, was allowed to keep his red coat. This coat was the envy of his fellow farm-workers, as they had to make do with rag coats themselves to try and keep out the cold and wet, and made Old George stand out as he worked in the fields.

As the Autumn drew to a close, with the ploughing and planting of winter wheat completed, the hedges trimmed and the ditches cleared out, there was little for the farmworkers to do, and with no work, it meant no pay. So for the first three weeks in December before Xmas a group went Morris dancing around the farms and large houses, trying to earn a few pence to help them and their families through the constraints of Winter. But this tradition had become to be seen as begging by the uncaring law-makers, and so the lads blacked up their faces in an attempt to disguise their features.

Carrying on the Morris, in good company, travelling the area, sleeping in barns, and with strong cider and hearty vegetable soups to maintain them, the lads had quite a time.

On the return to Thorndon Farm by George and the other workers, they decided to have one last night out at the Bird In Hand pub, about a mile away, before tightening the belts and putting their meagre savings to one side. They were joined by the farmer and his brothers, and a jolly, lively time was had by most of the group, playing darts and cribbage. George, however, sat to one side, pipe lit, in quiet reflection, as was his way. He had seen too much in life to be light-hearted, but took comfort that others could be carefree.

At the end of the evening, and after a fair number of pints of cider, the men made their way back to the farm, through the falling snow, laughing and joking and generally horsing around. It was not until the next morning at breakfast that Old George's absence was noted, for it not like George to miss a meal. So a search party was assembled and retraced the route to the pub. About fifty yards before Windmill Lane joined the main road, one of the party spotted a red triangle poking up out of the snow. "That's Old George's coat!" he exclaimed, and sure enough it was. The snow was scrapped back to reveal George, still fast asleep and snoring. The combination of coat and a covering of snow had saved George from freezing to death, and this was a turning point for him. From that time on, for the rest of his long life, he talked to all who would listen about his experiences, both his time abroad in the service of his queen, and the traditions and situations at home. For Old George became a story teller.