

Former KGH consultant celebrates 100th birthday

A former consultant at Kettering General Hospital is celebrating after turning 100.

By The Newsroom

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Tom Cullen.

Tom Cullen, who worked at the hospital between 1951 and 1982, reached the milestone on Monday (February 6).

Mr Cullen now lives in Kent but will have treated thousands of patients during his time in Northamptonshire.

His family summed up his life so far, which included him becoming one of the Second World War's unsung heroes.

They said: "Tom was a farmer's son born and brought up at Clark's Farm, Kelvedon.

"He opted to go into medicine in the 1930s because farming was struggling in Essex at the time.

“His grandfather, also Thomas Cullen, had started Thomas Cullen and Son, a successful seed merchants in the early 20th century in Witham.

“Tom, the trainee doctor, was very involved with Witham Cricket Club where he played before the Second World War and where he was instrumental in reviving the club after the war ended.

“Tom is certainly one of the last of those unsung heroes of the Second World War and is certainly the oldest of the Old Boys of the Grammar School in Colchester, which he attended until 1934 before going to the Middlesex Hospital Medical School.

“Headmaster Cape had described him as a ‘brilliant boy’ in his leaving report.

“He qualified in medicine in September 1939 at the outbreak of war and worked as a house surgeon at the Middlesex Hospital until June 1940 when he enlisted as a medical officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

“After a short period of military training at RAF Halton he was posted first to Manston and then to serve on a medical board in London examining candidates for air crew.

“In November 1940 he was posted to the Middle East, travelling on The Empress of Canada sailing in convoy for protection, around the Cape and through the Suez Canal to Alexandria and then Cairo from where he was soon posted to Shallufa.

“Then he went on to Crete where he worked under increasing duress as the Germans attacked the airfield at Maleme where he was based.

“Suffering from dysentery he toiled alone for three days attending to more than 1,000 wounded men as the Germans came ever closer.

“For this heroic work he was later awarded the MBE Military for ‘devotion to duty and courage of the highest order’ as the citation read.

“He was subsequently taken prisoner and shipped first to Athens in June 1941 and then via a 12-day train journey to a castle in the north of Poland, Stalag XXA at Torun where he was to spend the next two and a half years.

“In 1951 he was appointed to the post of Consultant Surgeon at Kettering General Hospital where he was closely involved in the reorganisation and redevelopment of the hospital under the still developing NHS.

“He and Molly brought up four children, Gillian who married Terry and lives in Australia, Richard who took over Clark’s farm and married Janet who was a trainee nurse with Tom at Kettering, Thomas who became a doctor in Clacton and married Nicola (and who very sadly died in 2016) and Robert who married Claire and also became a doctor in Kent.

“Tom is the proud great-grandfather of 11 children and the grandfather also of 11.

“Today he lives alone, ably supported by Richard and Janet who live close by.

“He enjoys seeing visitors over a cup of tea and slice of cake and seems surprised at the interest taken in his war stories.”