

From Peeps Into the Past in the Farnham Herald - written by Monica Jones

## Sad end of an era as the bishops leave their castle

Concluding Mavis Standing's memories of a carefree childhood spent at Farnham Castle, this week we cover gardening for the Bishop and the family, the task that Mavis' father was employed to do. We finish on a sad note though, the departure for good of the Bishops of Guildford from their Farnham residence.

"Keeping the castle garden at its best was no easy task, it was very much a traditional kitchen garden and dad also had an allotment at the top of the Hart.

I don't ever remember mum buying vegetables or fruit, apart from the occasional banana which was a special treat and oranges for Christmas.

"Just about everything grew in the garden from the mundane to the exotic. There was all manner of soft fruit, vegetables of all kinds, asparagus, figs, wild strawberries and even a mulberry tree which grew near the tennis court. There were gravel paths at the top and bottom of the lawns which required constant hoeing and weeding the herbaceous border was never ending.

"Dad had an assistant gardener, Percy Mouseley, who was quiet elderly and had worked at Blackdown as a boy. Cutting the lawns during the summer was a mammoth task and usually undertaken in the evenings when it was cooler. It took two people to mow the steep banks, one to steer the heavy Atco motor mower and another at the top of the lawn hauling on a rope attached to the mower to stop it toppling down. Sometimes I would be required to ride on the tool box of the mower to add extra weight.

"Usually George Marples, the stonemason, was the ropeman while dad did the steering. I remember once though when my grandad came over from Runwick and cut the lawns with a scythe, it was a long job but the result was as good as any mower.

"There was much rivalry between dad and Harry Hewins, the Retreat House gardener, who lived at the Gatehouse with his wife and sons, Peter and Paul. This rivalry culminated in the Farnham and District Allotment Association's show held every year at the Church House.

"Dad usually did very well and I think the Borelli Cup was a permanent fixture on our sideboard. It required weeks of preparation to get everything to its peak at the right time but it didn't always go to plan. Mum once cut and served for Sunday dinner a magnificent cauliflower dada had been nurturing for weeks. I don't think their marriage was ever quite the same again!

"On another occasion dad didn't feel that his opinions came up to scratch so, just to make up the numbers, Harry suggested that dad enter a tray of his 'seconds'. To his horror the 'seconds' took first prize while Harry's 'champions' could only manage 'highly commended'. Once when the tomatoes hadn't performed to plan, I am sure the prizewinners had been gracing Annie Martin's stall the previous day!

"There always seemed to be something happening during the year at the castle, spring was my favourite, the gardens full of buds, bulbs and blossoms, the garden and the moat alive with birdsong of all kinds.

"Harry Hewins kept chickens in the lower moat which could only be reached by going over the wall in front of Fox's Tower and descending by means of a metal ladder screwed to the wall. I was taken down there every year to see the new baby chicks.

"In the summertime there would be a fete with pony rides and once a pageant. There would be cricket in the park, tomato sandwiches, the circus visiting and those long summer evenings that seemed to go on forever.

"We were also lucky enough to have holidays. We borrowed the bishop's sister's elderly Baby Austin 7 and visited dad's sister in Kingsbridge, South Devon and also Jim and Margaret Hay in Nottingham. Dad had an ex-army friend who was a Jerseyman and we spent many wonderful holidays there before it became a honeymooner's paradise.

"Autumn brought harvest festival with a bag of vegetables and a bunch of dahlias to be taken to school and placed in the parish church for the harvest festival service. We had an enormous bonfire and fireworks in the moat on November 5<sup>th</sup>. One year we had a brilliant 'Guy' wearing an old bowler hat of the bishop's and a pink hooksided corset whose donor preferred to remain anonymous!

"The sight of our normally sedate, gaitered bishop nimbly avoiding a Jumping Jack is one I shall never forget! I think it eventually jumped up Paul Hewins trouser leg!

"Christmas at the castle had a magic all of its own. WE decorated the house with foliage from the garden and I am sure all Christmases were white then! Dad would always work on Christmas Eve while mum scurried around to finish her last minute preparations, then we would walk down to the bottom of Castle Street where there would be community carol singing around a huge Christmas tree. Then we would come home to mince pies and the sound of church bells from St Andrews at midnight.

"I don't think anyone was more surprised than our bishop when, in 1956, Her Majesty chose him to be her new Bishop of London. He had already told dad that he was sure he would not be chosen as he was too old and Guildford was too new a Diocese.

"When talking to an eminent churchman many years later I was surprised to learn that Bishop Montgomery-Campbell was 'very popular with the lay, not so popular with the clergy' perhaps an early sign from the young Queen that she would be guided but not led?

"We were saddened to hear that the castle would no longer be a bishop's residence and we rally hoped we would be able to stay on in some capacity but it was not to be. Dad found a new job as caretaker of the old Farnham Girls Grammar School in Menin Way, now South Farnham School, where he would stay until he retired in 1977.

"Recently I spoke to one of my cousins, we hadn't met for many years and as we reminisced he said 'We were so lucky, we had an idyllic childhood.'

"I couldn't agree more, by today's standards, materially we were very poor but in other ways we were millionaires."

The castle gatehouse shown in the photograph was the home of the 'other' gardener and the Church House was the setting for most of their horticultural battles.

One disadvantage to living in such a glorious home was the huge number of steps the residents had to negotiate when coming into or returning from the town.

The Castle Steps are shown in the third photograph and Mavis at the age of three took herself off to the 'pictures' but didn't fancy the steps so walked down the dangerous road alongside. Fortunately the coalman recognised and quickly returned her to an anxious mother.

I am sure you will agree with me that what Mavis has described could well be called an idyllic childhood and I think her final sentiments certainly sum up her experiences accurately.