

DEVON, THE BEGINNING.

The spot in South Devon was a small village 18 miles from Plymouth, 9 miles from Kingsbridge and was called Kingston. The very place in Kingston was a field, a five-acre field owned by a Rogers, I think 'Old Rogers'. There were of course many Rogerses. He didn't at first want to sell his field, but when - I think one hundred - nice new pound notes were laid out on the table, it is said, he changed his mind. It seems reasonable to suppose that the plans were all drawn up in London, but I am not at all sure that that is what happened. I still have one or two of the sketches from the architect. Work commenced, local labour was employed with, I think, Leslie Troupe in charge. Beautiful timber was ordered from Canada. The sewage system was all laid out, the foundations and a couple of chimneystacks built, and the garage built. My mother bought bales and bales of heavy linen for curtains, bedspreads and the like. The months, and a year or two, marched on. So did Hitler!

Over an intervening period time was spent between the two locations, with a practice to be sold on the one hand and a large house to be built on the other. I was eventually sent to Devon, in Hilde's company part of the time, the rest of that time I stayed with Lesley and Lena Troupe.

I do not know in what year the whole convalescent home thing drew to a grinding halt, I think probably a few months into the 1940 - 45 war. Materials were simply not available for private building any more, nor ships to transport timber from Canada. Everyone in England believed that the war would very soon be over, so all this was supposed to be a temporary affair only. Lesley went to war, where he died tragically somewhere of appendicitis!

After, I suppose, a considerable amount of soul searching, the decision was made to move into the completed garage which had two upstairs rooms intended for a housekeeper and groundsman couple. So the base room had an iron stove built into it, as well as a sink, and it was turned into an all purpose living room. A toilet outside. For a bath a metal tub behind a screen was used. Water was pumped by hand from an artesian well, and heated in buckets over Primus stoves. For months this method was also used for all clothes washing, and in those days, my mother reminded me years later, men, doctors certainly, wore starched collars.

It was a motley crew, our family, that descended on Kingston. There were my mum, and Doc who was a rather small and most unusual doctor, Hilde - this foreign woman with a Germanic accent, and Betty. Betty was Miss Shawbakka she was a little old Jewish lady, and was mentally deranged. Miss Shawbakka was a patient of Doc's and her family begged him to take her with him to Devon. It was naturally a business deal, and because she provided a certain income my mother rather tended to call her "bread and butter". I remember her only as a small person all in black with white hair in a topknot. She was quite harmless, and spent her days walking from the house to the gate and back. She had done, I believe, some secret service work in the first world war, and spoke many languages. She was German, and 'in extremis' would stand around giving herself up, and saying "they are coming to take me away now, you know, oh yes, they are coming to take me away". I think she must have been with us a year or two before she died. I can remember that during air raids my mother used to shove us under the kitchen table. This being the only place she could imagine as safe should the house receive a direct hit from a bomb being dropped on the way back from Plymouth. This could happen in order to lighten the load of the German bombers on the return flight. This good lady never could understand the rationale behind being shoved under a table in the middle of the night! Miss Shawbakka occupied the second upstairs room. Right, beyond the five above mentioned, there was a canary in a cage, and a Pekinese dog. Added to these was, very soon, a goat. I have no idea at all how the people, dog and canary all fitted into that tiny house, I can only suppose that Hilde and I slept in the downstairs room. Hilde was not there so very long at that stage.