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Robert Dimsdale Part II – Boyhood Memories

Notes from an interview with Robert Dimsdale, recorded in 2007.

The garden at Barkway House seemed to have a lot of people involved, most important of which was Mr George Crouch. Commanding the garden and in charge of the glass, and often dressed in complete sort of macintosh outfits with a canister on his back and constantly spraying everything in the greenhouses was Cyril Westgate, also very kindly and prepared to talk to children wandering about. There was Mr Jackson who was responsible for a very long and difficult border and did mowing as well.

My grandmother had very good eyesight. She couldn't see anything close to but could tell exactly who was going across the field and was quite proud of this. I think it was because she knew that Cyril Westgate always wound the clock at a particular time so when she saw a figure crossing the field she would say "Ah, that must be Mr Westgate because I can see him".

In the yard there was Charlie Copeland who looked after much carpentry and some plumbing. He had one leg; he had looked after the gun carriages and howitzers in World War I and had marvellous bags of rare tools and he also was kindly disposed to wandering children. Also, the chauffeur whom I never discovered how he was spelt but he answered to Westbroom, who was responsible for a very large Austin which had a big chart on the wall explaining which bits of it needed servicing at different times.

I wasn't at Barkway House all the time. At one stage my grandmother was unwell, my mother was ill, father was absent anyway and I was taken into the nursery at Cokenach, which I liked. At Cokenach were Mr and Mrs Douglas Crossman. Mrs Crossman was absolutely delightful, and I never felt in the least bit other than extremely happy there. Mr Crossman I was slightly alarmed by. I would have to go to the far end of the then Billiard Room where he would be in his large chair in front of the fire to say goodnight to him and his normal injunction was "Don't give me a wet kiss boy" and I would then go off to bed.

**How old were you then?*

I don't know, maybe four.