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## Robert Dimsdale Part I – Boyhood Memories

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

I was born in Barkway House, and I was baptised in the sink. I was not necessarily expected to survive long and shortly afterwards I was taken to India but came back again before the outbreak of World War II. Barkway House was my Granny's house - May Chapman - and she was in charge. My mother, Elizabeth Dimsdale, was here at Barkway House most of the time. My father was in the Far East, and I first saw him when I was six.

The most important person working here was Mrs Mary Corrigan. I remember soldiers in the kitchen and field guns in the garage. It looked to me like battery orders were taking place in the kitchen with Mrs Corrigan still carrying on cooking. She was a very enterprising woman as she had lost a leg in an accident when she was hit by a bus in London as a teenager and was fitted with an aluminium one.

A great feature of Christmas Day was Mrs Corrigan's tea which was enormous, and we all had to partake of it after having had a huge Christmas lunch. I spent a lot of time in the kitchen occupying the windowsill and had fleets of paper boats and was able to see everything that went on. She and my grandmother were very good sparring partners and I think Mrs Corrigan was an excellent traditional puddings cook. She was a bit fierce on green vegetables and she had her staff in the kitchen as well to help her prepare them.

The next most important person in the house was probably Kathleen Muncey, a charming lady and great ally of Mrs Corrigan and my mother for most of her life. Then there was Joan Bonfield who always appeared as it was getting dark. She would move silently round the house, get my grandmother's room ready for her to go to bed, draw curtains and do all sorts of arranging and tidying with extreme discretion and sort of silence and a cheerful smile is what I remember. Espie Smith was quite different. She was very definite and assertive, but a very good ally to Mrs Corrigan and my mother. Mr Wilderspin had a sort of footman's pantry and was in charge of everything going to the dining room, which was a long way from the kitchen.