

Baronsdown House

Memories of a Beautiful House, Birth Place of my Three Children.

by Joann Barrett Nee Grove

I lived in that wonderful house with my parents, John and Winifred Grove, my stepbrother and my sister from 1953 until 1967. My father farmed the land and we had a large flock of black faced cluns, fifteen Jersey cows, twenty or more bullocks plus thirty milking cows, pigs and a large battery of hens.

Baronsdown House was an imposing house sitting at the top of Bury Hill looking down on to the village of Dulverton. It was a large house of some 24 rooms consisting of a huge lounge with a walk-in fireplace and front facing windows, an octagonal shaped reception hall and grand stairway leading to the upper floors. Opposite the lounge was a large dining room of almost the same size, beyond which was a bay shaped sitting room accessed via a passage at the side of which also led to the games rooms down 2 steps. This room had 2 doors, 1st by the passage between sitting room, 2nd up 2 steps to exit by the passage next to the kitchen.

The kitchen was a large room with a full size Aga cooking range, wall-mounted plate racks and sinks big enough to take the biggest of pots and pans. Beyond this was another large room which was equipped as a prep room again with large sinks and work surfaces with hanging racks. Opposite the kitchen door was a larder or cold storage room with a marble shelf and various sized shelves all round.

Past the kitchen to the left was an exit to a short alleyway which led to the housekeepers private rooms and also the side gardens beyond. At the back of the house was the dairy which led outside to the courtyard and stables. These were half pulled down as they were considered dangerous. There was a short stairway leading to the ostler's living space above the stables and saddlery. One the other side of the courtyard, was the carriage block, which later became the calf pens (in my time).

Through the rear gates from the courtyard and slightly to the left down to the gardener's shed, there were two greenhouses, one had tomatoes and cucumbers and the other had two camellia trees, one red and one white. I spent many days helping to re-glaze these greenhouses. Beyond the greenhouses were two pig stys.

Back towards the main drive there were two large brick built ponds which I understood were trout holding pools. This area was completely overgrown with bamboo (no idea why).

Looking down from the main house towards the lawned area, there was a flat square area on the left that used to be the tennis court and, directly in front of the house, there was a path and steps down to the terraced vegetable and fruit gardens. There were at least three tiers on either side. I spent many happy hours with my mother digging and harvesting here.

A short walk down the driveway leading to Baby Lane, there were some narrow pathways on the left. These were all man-made and very decorative with small walled fountains. Further down still, in Baby Lane, there was cave entrance (when we were there, bats had set up home) and an old gardener's cottage (I'm not sure which came first). At the bottom of Baby Lane, there was a gateway lodge and the main road. The lodge had been abandoned for many years.

The two huge pillars at the Louisa Gate entrance to Baronsdown are now half the size that they used to be and to the right of the entrance were two separate cottages (one up and one down type). My father converted them into the house that you see today with a view, at the time, of me and the children living there, I think.

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