

Broadmoor and Crowthorne

Dorothy and I were faced with many challenges when we arrived at Broadmoor in 1959. So many things were happening at the same time but throughout it all we stayed united as a family and steadfastly loyal to each other. Dorothy let me set priorities.

Our first task was to establish ourselves at Broadmoor and we all went on a charm offensive. We were lucky in being allowed to live on Broadmoor Hospital estate, indeed we were allocated a large (5-bedroom) house just outside the main entrance to the hospital. It had nearly an acre of garden including a modern garage (ideal for housing injured birds of prey, even if the car had to come out into the rain and snow). The house had been one of those built when the hospital was opened in 1863. The garden had been tended and cultivated over the years by a working party of 6 patients (trusted men known as parole patients under the supervision of a male nurse). This working party would produce vegetables each week for us as a family; other working parties produced fruit and vegetables for other senior staff.

Before we occupied the house it had been occupied for some time by the Deputy Medical Superintendent. In recent times a tarmac tennis court had been constructed. We had many visitors from among our old friends. The tennis court proved popular as did some of the functions like the stage productions put on by the Patients every year. Most of the actors and actresses (all patients) were very good and the Broadmoorists (as they were called) enjoyed their activities thoroughly.

Dorothy and I attended and enjoyed most of the activities we were called on to perform. There were sports days, horticultural shows, dinners in the Staff Club, staff dances, patients' dances, Cricket Club socials, cricket matches within the hospital walls (we once played against the Glamorgan County Cricket Club). We were tickled by the novelty of being VIPs and we developed a real affection for those we met during our Broadmoor days. We were helped immensely over all the 15 years I worked at the hospital by the kindness and loyalty the Medical Superintendent and his family showed us.

Crowthorne took us to its heart too. I was given great help by Broadmoor staff, several Wellington College staff and local traders. Parents of the lads in my Scout Group trusted me, parents of Dorothy's school-children and her Brownie Pack trusted her. Dorothy had numerous interests. She had always been interested in music and choral work, and she joined the Broadmoor choir, a mix of patients of both sexes and staff also, and a few Crowthorne friends. I did not join the choir, I was busy with Scouting and the Natural History Group I had helped to start.

The story of the Natural History Group is one of which I am very proud – even to this day, 40 years later. It all began when Dr Cyril Perry, the Deputy Medical Superintendent of Broadmoor Hospital, was about to retire. His wife Kay, a Prison Medical Officer herself, told me in confidence that she was worried about Cyril not having an over-riding interest to keep him happy in his retirement. I talked to Dorothy and John and the family came up with the idea of a Natural History Group for Crowthorne. Dorothy and I asked the local – and Broadmoor – Pharmacist George Connock and his wife Mary (a keen wild flower observer and recorder) to help us, and Derek Angwin, a tutor at Wellington College, to join us to form a committee with Kay and Cyril. We worked well together, Cyril as Chairman, George as Treasurer, and myself as Secretary and Programme Secretary. We had plenty of support from a lot of people; we met monthly for an indoor meeting at Kay and Cyril's house. Dorothy and I offered hospitality to speakers and a snack at our house, Mary and George offered learned advice on botany, Derek had several knowledgeable colleagues, including Leonard Leakey, a member of the famous

Leakey family of Kenya who made anthropological discoveries of early man at Olduvai Gorge, the supposed cradle of humanity in Africa.

As well as indoor meetings we met once a month for field meetings. We were a hardy lot. I can recall several field meetings in winter when only a couple of people braved the elements. But there were the beautiful summer days when we – and the birds and the butterflies and the wild life – were out in profusion. Dorothy and I maintained that our foreign holidays (of which there were over 20) were only taken to get slides to show at some future indoor meeting. John was a great help, and as we got to know Maxwell Knight and members of the Camberley Natural History Society we expanded our interests. Maxwell Knight had an impish sense of humour and was very popular with our members. Our John was Maxwell Knight's deputy in the Crowthorne area and was our hands-on illustrator. No one could compare with him for plucking snakes or slowworms from their hiding places!

Soon after John published his first book *Veterinary Aspects of Birds of Prey*, telephone requests for advice started to come in; and it soon became apparent that some callers had noticed the similarity of speech and intonation of John and me. One day a caller who knew John personally could not believe it was John's father answering. He said to me "Come off it, John. I know it's you. Tell me what your opinion is of this problem." I had to give some reply – but I have the same sense of humour as John also. So I said "Tell me. Is the problem mainly at the top of the bird or in the middle or at the bottom? If it's in the head my diagnosis is frounce (actually a throat complaint of birds). If it is in the middle it's aspergillosis (actually a lung complaint). If it's at the bottom it's bumblefoot (a disease of the foot). If the bird lies on its back and puts its feet in the air it's dead!" How many birds I saved by my brilliant diagnosis I do not know. I trust nobody recorded my failures!