

Pets

With a garden (small as it was) at Rutland Avenue we felt we had an estate, and the idea of keeping pets occurred to us. Pets had always formed a part of Dorothy's parents' home and I had always enjoyed looking for such interesting creepy-crawlies as beetles, caterpillars, chrysalids, butterflies, moths, etc. in the wayside bushes and road verges and fields. Add to this John's natural leanings and we had the perfect background for a nature garden.

We soon acquired two guinea pigs, a rabbit and later on a dog, a series of cats, insects, etc. We loved the guinea pigs in particular. They were pure white, the female smooth haired, the male with rosettes. They had babies regularly every few months and the babies were beautiful, each a miniature replica of its mother or father. We could not keep them all, of course. So as they grew up we had to give them away to friends or to the local park where our local council had a refuge which accepted guinea pigs and a few other unwanted animals.

We took our mini-menagerie with us when we moved to Crowthorne in 1959. We left behind, buried in the garden, the bodies of various creatures which John had collected (dead) from the seashore, such as the five feet long seal which may be found some time in the future and lead to some so-called expert expostulating on the likelihood of our old garden having been part of some coral reef in days gone by.

When we arrived with our mini-menagerie in Crowthorne in 1959 we quickly acquired a female ferret and a cat and lots of animals which came John's way particularly when Major Maxwell Knight, who lived in nearby Camberley, deputed John to be his unofficial agent in our area. Being a famous man Major Knight attracted much hero worship (I was probably as star-struck as John) and I even persuaded him to talk to a large gathering of Cub Scouts where he got an impish pleasure from telling the gathering periodically during his talk "I think that is a question that Mr Cooper can answer better than I". He was kind enough to help me answer the questioner though! A nice man!! Sadly he died soon after he helped us set up the Crowthorne Natural History Group (which is still going strong 40 years on).

When Dorothy was a schoolteacher she brought home several silkworm caterpillars to keep them alive over the summer holiday. We took them away with us on our own holiday in Devon. Several people in Devon probably still remember us calling to scrounge mulberry leaves which we had spotted growing in their gardens. Mad summer visitors!