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ROWLANDS CASTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY ORAL HISTORIES

ROBERT WILLIAM FARR

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Rowlands Castle

I am Robert William Farr. My date of birth is 9th June 1934. I was born 3 doors from where I live now, what was 4 Castle Road. My parent's names were Doris Lavinia Farr and William Farr. I was an only child. My mother came from London, a cockney, came down here to go into service with Mrs Martin and Colonel Martin of Redhill house. She married at Beddington to my father, a local man, William Farr. My mother's maiden name was Doris Lavinia Pierce. My father was a baker for Royal's bakery. He had a variety of jobs; a lot of villagers had a variety of jobs. He worked for Masons, the coal merchants during the war and had spells in the brickyard. He was a relief digger driver. Most local men had spells in the brickyard. It was a job they would go to while they looked for something else.

My earliest memory really was seeing the big diggers doing the main drainage. I would only have been about 3 when they started. I can remember going up Links lane, my mother taking me to see them because she did not want me to be frightened when they were working outside our house. It was the sewerage that came here in 1937. Finchdean road has no sewerage, it was their fault. They were asked if they paid £1000 each to have main drainage put in. They had a vote and declined. All the big houses were in Links Lane, the gardens are now divided up and houses put in the gardens. But there are quite a few large gardens up there.

I started school aged 5, at St. John's Church of England School, the old school, at the top of Redhill, near the Staunton Arms. Miss Bursey was the headmistress. Miss Baker, Junior teacher, she had been there many years. Over the time I can remember a Mrs White and a Mr Tutton, who came to the school at the end of his service with the R.A.F. during the war. Mr Tutton seemed like a giant to us when he came, he was so big. He was a form master and took the boys for sport. I liked cricket and soccer.

I played a lot of golf too in my time. We were allowed in the war to play golf in the rough. All the village boys had golf clubs in their shed because most of their father was caddies, as young people we also did caddying. You could start caddying from the age of ten, this when you were big enough to carry the bag, but they weren't the big bags of to-day with all the clubs. We were paid about 2shillings a round, but after you had been caddying a little while you soon got your man, your regular golfer and I used to caddy for a Mr Cummins who had the Parade Hotel in Southsea, and caddied for him until 1960. I joined the club in 1959 and the arrangement was then that on the Sunday morning, I would caddy for him and he would retire after 9 holes and then I would take his place in the four. They had a little society within the Club called the Turf Flingers, a group of 8-10 members who formed this little society. We used to go caddying to all the local courses every now and again with them. We went as a party and they provided the beer and sandwiches, and as a boy drinking beer was something! You know we went to Liss, Blackmoor and places like that. Caddied Sunday mornings regular and when I did my National Service, if I was not home for

the weekend, my father would caddy in my place for the same gentleman so we did not let him down..

I went to St. John's school until 2 terms before I left when all senior pupils had to go to Emsworth C.of.E. School. This was before Warblington School was built. The headmaster at Emsworth was a Mr Brown. We went by bus. But getting to Mr Brown, he was one of the two fairest people I have ever met in my life. Very strict but very fair and I stayed there and then left in 1949 and went to work in Stansted gardens although the Headmaster wanted me to either go into the bank or work for the Home and Colonial. That is the messenger boys; they were built up to manager. But as I was set on being a gardener, I went to Stansted.

There were 13 of us in the gardens and I feel pleased that I saw the end of how gardening was done in Victorian times. It was still done that way in Stansted. The way we worked was very old-fashioned but they had good –sized staff and could afford the time until Lord Bessborough died and death duties took a lot from the estate. At that time, because I was due to do National Service within 6 months I was one to go and another, Fred James, he was taken on temporarily at the end of the war and he had to go. But Mr Tomalin, the head gardener, found me a job with Bailey Nurseries at Petersfield. I was there until I joined National Service. I was in the Royal Hampshire regiment. My job in there: I went to be a paratrooper because the money was good. I went up and failed, mainly because the paratroop regiment was to become a regular unit. The ones that said they did not want to become regulars failed, the ones that did not mind being a regular, they passed.

Going back to completing my basic training, I became the Commanding officers batman/gardener, because of the particular house the C.O. occupied, at Itchen Abbas, these houses were commandeered by the army at the beginning of the war. They were being returned to private ownership. The houses all had to go back to the standard that they had been taken up. So therefore, he had to have a batman/gardener. At times we would have demobilisation parties coming through. People who were going because the regiment was in Germany and Malaya. We had fatigue parties which would come out and help. I was in the barracks, but I was a lot of time in Itchen Abbas, I slept there when I was on duty. The C.O. went on to become C.O. of the Canadian School of Infantry. He was a Major Warren, later C.O. of the regiment. His son, who I used to have to give cricket practice to, he also went into the Royal Hampshire Regiment. They had a dog, a Blue Roan Cocker Spaniel, which was quite young and they could not take it to Canada so I brought it home with me. It stayed with my mother and lived to the age of 14. I used to walk with the son in the evening along the River Itchen with the dog; it was a lovely life for 2 years.

When I came out I went as a gardener then for the Admiralty who had moved from Leigh Park House down to West Leigh. I was gardening there when I met some interesting people, notably Commander Crabb. In the winter or on bad days our job was to move things about. I moved a lot of stuff for Commander Crabb. He lived in the village, in Durrants. He used to use the Staunton Arms. They were underwater weapons and counter measures. The moved up to AISWI, up on the hill, at which time I became gardener for Mr Hollings in Bowes Hill.

He owned a strip of land at the back of Bowes hill which went up to Wellsworth Lane and Meadowlands was built on his ground. We had 2.5 acres. When I went there, Bill Stratton, the farmer, used to keep his cows in the field but then they developed the field. I worked for Mr Hollings until his death and went on through his widow, and then the top part of the garden became part of the Meadowlands Estate. I worked for her fulltime for 2 years and then part-time for a number of years, having to work 306

hours because I lived in a tied cottage, you see. 1 Castle Road, Mr Hollings bought that cottage for us to live there and so, you know, to stay in the house, I carried on working in my spare time.

I went onto work at a little factory SPQR which was opposite to where I lived, which made tappet tools and a tracking device as well. We used to export all over the world. We even exported to Japan, quite a lot of stuff. This went on until 1983 when with the bosses getting on they decided to close the factory. The factory is still there, the little workshop is still there but the ground was sold off and there are 4 houses on there now.

So in 1983, I became self-employed and have been self-employed ever since. When I joined SPQR there would have been about 12 employees but when the 3 day week came, several left and were never replaced and we put some of the manufacturing out to contract and only assembled... We supplied customers in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Denmark and France. Mr Sturges was the designer and brains and Mr Tompkins, who had a big Manor House called Goaly Manor in Tilsted, I can't quite remember. He phones us every Christmas to see how we are getting on. We did meet up 3 years ago at Mr Sturges's funeral, but we get threatened with a reunion but do not seem to get one but everyone's got their lives, haven't they?

I married in 1956, Sheila Elizabeth Emily Newton, who was a Havant girl. I met her on the way down from cricket in Stansted one Sunday afternoon. She was walking with her cousin along Old Idsworth. We had taken quite a detour to come round that way and just happened to meet her and her cousin. This would be 1950, we were married in 1956. She worked for Home and Colonial in Havant. When I started working for the Admiralty, she moved to work in the canteen at Westleigh. We were married at St. John's, Rowlands Castle, because at that time, everyone married at the end of March because of the tax relief. and churches were really full. Her church, the Congregational, Havant could not fit us in so we got married in St. John's. we had our reception in the Red Cross hut in Havant and we got all the guests down there. We had a double decker bus, it cost £2.10 shillings from Southdown and we ferried all the guests down in that and we had all the flowers from Mr Waghorne, who had a nursery in Westbourne: and 5 bridesmaids' and bridal bouquet and buttonholes for the men and ladies for £3.10 shillings.

We have four children: Laurence, Rosemary, Pauline and Lynda. Laurence is self-employed gardener in the Village locally. Rosemary is married to Robert Brown, professional golfer and so she helps him with his business. He has a small course at Denmead and a small course at Hayling and a driving range. Pauline works for Martin Steels, she does the prescriptions on spectacles in Emsworth. Lynda was working as a girl in Woolworths Havant. When it was going to close, we were working for a landscaping company called Garden Panorama Nautec (a company which I helped to form in the village) down on the Airport Estate and I asked if there was a job going and she went down there to work and she is still there. It has changed names several times. She goes all over the world with the business. So for a Woolworth's girl...

At Stansted, I was indoors boy, four in the greenhouses, then those employed in the pleasure grounds and there were those in the kitchen garden and the kitchen garden boy. I wish I had listened to the kitchen gardener, Mr Bushroyd. He used to offer me lots of advice re growing vegetables and I thought 'that's not my job, I do not want to know' but I wish that I had listened a lot more to him because in later years, I did a lot of showing in local shows, also in Guildford and a few times at RHS shows in London at the Autumn veg shows, and sweet peas and chrysanthemums. Both when working for Mr Hollings and after he died, growing from home.

I won the Portsmouth Guildhall Cup fourteen years running. A few at the RHS, I used to go up on the train with a few bits and pieces. Yes, only ever won 2 first prizes there. I had one very good pair of marrows which would have taken first prize if there had been a thousand entries, they were perfect and that was very good. I also won with 6 plates of potatoes. Where you put 6 different varieties of potatoes on 6 plates. I have only medals now, most of the cups you win are returned. The only cup I got was the Rowlands Castle Sweet Pea cup which we won 3 years running and that became our own.

I met some wonderful people at showing, the better the gardener the nicer the man. There wasn't any of the nastiness. I met some very, very good gardeners especially out in West Sussex. Bert Delves worked for the Sainsbury's, Randall who worked for Getstetners. They specialised in fruit mainly. A man by the name of White, who worked in Baxendales of Chichester. All good men, who would give you a lot of advice, would give you seeds, plants to bring on. If you went to the garden to see it and you were offered something out of the garden you could be sure that they would always pull the best one to give you. If they gave you a cauliflower it was always the best one, which was nice.

The secret of growing the perfect marrow: -variety really, you do not want big marrows. There is a very good variety called Table Dainty and it would grow, it will grow bigger, but only about a foot in length and I believe a foot round. But they are so tender you can see that they are tender without your nail under. I am still growing it at home now. It runs everywhere but it is a lovely marrow, I usually buy fresh seed each time.

Being self-employed, I work all over the village. In the summer, I have a contract to keep the golf club, car park, hedges and flower borders. I start over there before 6 in the morning, then I go home just before quarter past 7 and then I have my breakfast before I set up on my proper jobs and we work for all kinds of people.

Lord Bessborough used to come down into the garden, he would find me and want to talk cricket and with his walking stick he would show me how different strokes were played and he formed a Stansted Boys Team and we played matches on cricket up there in the evenings, and also at weekends we occasionally had a game. He laid on the teas and at the end we were sent home with a little parcel of sweets an apple and orange, because sweets were on ration, you see. I can always remember one team came from Portsmouth from Saltern Social, these boys had never seen anything like this, and it was rather like Battersea boys in the war. It was a complete change of life for them. He was really good to us and we could only get 9 boys from the estate, we used to have to bring in 2 from outside. Naturally, we always brought in 2 good players in. Boys that lived on the estate were the Butler's boys, and in the garden we had our own horse and the chap that looked after it, a Mr Hussey, he had a grandson who used to play then another chap who worked in the pleasure grounds by the name of Chase, he had a son that played. Between them all we managed 9. Lord Bessborough used to take a great interest in us and when he was there he would come and watch and that is why he would come down and tell me how I got out.

I had to go by my second name at Stansted. He called everyone by their Christian name but because we had one Robert, we could not have two Roberts so I had to be William

The horse was used for picking up the mowing because they were left in heaps but chiefly in taking things to market. They used to go down to Kings of Emsworth and they would transport it up to Covent Garden. Sent through Kings.

Figs, I acquired quite a taste for figs because one of my jobs as indoor boy was to hold this fruit tray which was all padded with cotton wool and a lining of tissue paper over the top and the chap in charge of that range of greenhouses would be up the ladder picking the figs. When we came to a ripe one, or an over ripe one they were the ones we had and I love figs only because of being brought up on them.

Grapes, they had marvellous grapes. Also they had long greenhouses, what they called the Orchard House in which were all the peaches and nectarines. In the Spring, the back wall of this greenhouse was always painted pale blue so that when the peaches were just coming into leaf and then into flower so that you had the pink flowers and green shoots against this lovely blue background.

(Now when I come home, all I really want to do is to go up and sit in the garden with a glass of wine and we had such a marvellous summer last year, we did this regularly)

Mr Tomalin was the head gardener at Stansted. Each morning he would go up with flowers for flower arranging and one carnation for Lord Bessborough for his buttonhole and other than that his job was office work and organising the work. He used to prune one apple tree and pick the apples off that one tree. It was a Laxton Epicure, I think. That really was his sort of job.

The main work was done by Mr. Crockford, the indoor foreman, a very good gardener. He would produce these big Japanese Chrysanthemums which would not fit into a gallon bucket, they were that big. Wonderful cyclamen he produced. Then he dealt mainly with the grapes as well. Time consuming job, you had the thinning of them, you had to be so careful. Underneath the grape vines we used to grow mustard and cress in the winter and we used to have bamboo sticks with two razor blades set in them and we used to cut and put them into punnets. And this must have been because you grow cress a few days earlier than the mustard and you have a rotation of beds. It was a nice warm job in the winter to be in there cutting mustard and cress.

They went to market, most probably 200 punnets of mustard and cress at a time.

Another thing about Lord Bessborough, he always had a harvest supper. We used to go into the chapel and have a little service then we all used to get on the horse, Dolly, her name was and the cart at the back was all arranged for seating and used to journey up and down to Holme Farm and we went there and had a meal and were entertained by variety artists. Wives went, and then you had drinks, then most probably, everyone went home by 12 o'clock, which was quite late in those days. Nowadays 12 o'clock is quite early. That was always on a Friday evening towards the end of September and the following Saturday was the one day you were allowed to be a little late. I worked a 47 hour week up there.

Memories of D-day. Most probably in March, when all the roads had lines and a number in the corner of each for the vehicle to come into and we woke up one morning to find all the parking spaces taken. They started with the lighter trucks, gradually they would move on and heavier vehicles came in ending up with Matador lorries These were heavy army lorries and big guns and they broke up all the pavements up. At the beginning of May, all along the Green, tanks parked with their backs to the wall. At school, there was so much military traffic that we looked out of the window so we were taken down to the Thicket and we had our lessons down there in the bracken so we were not disturbed. So that our attention was not taken, our heads were out of the window all the time.

Various people took the soldiers in and we had a sergeant, named Taylor used to come and have lunch on a Sunday, He came from Huddersfield. Because they were not allowed to write home, but villagers would get letters off to parents. When they were all going away, they would throw out all their money to us and the idea was to stand

by a little girl because they used to like to throw their money at little girls but she could not pick it all up so we had it. But this was constant comings and goings, the vehicles got heavier and heavier. At the end of the War, German prisoners of war made up Redhill Road, they did that. The Italian POW tended to work on the farms but the German POWs rebuilt pavements and roads.

One day we were all ushered out of School, we did not know what was going on, and all lined up along the road because the King came past because had just been to review the troops in preparation for D Day. he was in an enclosed car as I remember it. He waved and, of course, we all waved back.

With all the rations and cans of petrol and ammunition around on the pavements. Also, there was a cookhouse in the rough ground at the end of Castle Road and Redhill Road, where there are two houses built now and first thing in the morning, my friend Quinton Moat and I used to go down there and help serve out the breakfasts, go to school and in the evening go there and help serve the tea cum supper. Very often, at the end of the day, we were sent home with quite a lot chunky cheese and biscuits and if there were remnants in the big pots of jam we were given those. A can of jam with perhaps a couple of inches of jam in. My mother, aunts and grandmother were very pleased to receive biscuits and cheese.

The Canadians were up in the Forest at the time of Dieppe, they had Bren Gun carriers and we used to go down to the arches and get a lift on Bren Gun carriers. They used to fill up at Bill Barrett's petrol pump. Then we would ride back down with them and wait for another one to come. Because there was a continual stream of these we used to have a lot of rides in Bren Gun carriers.

The Village Fair was always held in the recreation ground before the war and I can remember going up there and seeing the big tent. They used to have races as well and all the produce was in the Big tent and it was quite a major thing. I can only vaguely remember that after that the Village Fair was taken by the Conservatives. It was behind the wall at Deerleap on the lawn there. Then it moved to Stansted, into the bottom of Stansted not up at the house, but where the Lavants come through. It was taken there after Winnicots had moved or what... then next to the parish hall, but a Hall is not the same for a Flower Show in the summer you do need a tent. My boss fell out with the Show people in the Conservative Association because they had Challenge cups and you could win one year in three. He said it was not a Challenge cup and so he stopped showing there. We went to Emsworth, Hayling Hambleton and places rather like that, rather than show in the Village. The only thing we would show was the Sweet Peas. That was the cup that if you one 3 years running you kept it, and so we won it 3 years running, I have the cup at home now, he had it engraved and gave it to me. Well then another cup was put up and we won it 2 years running and then Mr Hollings died and Mrs Hollings refused to enter it because she thought if we won it again they would feel we should have it. She said 'you are working for me now and not Mr Hinds.

