

Memories of Sandhall

From 1937-1941, my mother, Mary Fysh, (formerly Leighton), worked as a housemaid for Mr. and Mrs. Scholfield at Sandhall Park, and the following is an account of her experiences.

I didn't have an interview because Mrs. Scholfield liked to employ girls she already knew who lived on the estate and my father was one of their tenants, working at Sandhall Farm. Once a month, on a Monday, she'd ride over to our house at Skelton collecting money for War Bonds and I was at home when she called. Most village girls were expected to enter service after leaving school and I was happy to accept her offer of a job. I was to be paid thirty shillings a month and the terms included food and accommodation.

My possessions were taken by car and I followed on my trusty bike. When I arrived at the Hall, spring-cleaning was in progress and some of the men were shifting the heavy antique furniture and rolling up the carpets to be beaten outside. Mrs. Scholfield didn't expect her maids to do any heavy work. Our boots and shoes were always taken to the stables to be cleaned and polished by the stable-lads, and our laundry was taken care of by Mr. and Mrs. Atkinson, who lived at Laundry Cottage. Mr. Atkinson was also employed as Mr. Scholfield's chauffeur.

The cook was Isabel Bayston, who'd trained in London, and she was assisted by Norah Shaw who was the kitchen-maid. Dulcie Ackney, Edna Watson, Ada Claydon and me, all worked as housemaids. We each had our own rooms on the second floor of the house, reached by a back staircase, even Dulcie, whose family lived just across the road in the Groom's Cottage. There was also a sitting-room where we could listen to the wireless. After living at home with six brothers and sisters, I enjoyed having some space of my own.

I also liked having electric lights. The electricity was powered by a generator because the villages in the area weren't 'switched on' until 1952, although we didn't have many labour-saving devices. There was a small refrigerator in the kitchen, but no vacuum-cleaner and I had to use a dustpan and brush to clean the bedroom carpets. The Hall also had two bathrooms and flush toilets, something else that most people didn't have at that time.

My main jobs were tidying the bedrooms in the mornings, cleaning the silver and waiting at table every evening. Sometimes I answered the telephone which was linked to the farm. The family dressed for dinner and usually ate five courses. There was a spy-hole in the dining-room door so we could see when they were ready for the next course. After dinner, they'd retire to the library which was used as a sitting-room.

For my morning duties I wore a cap and apron and changed into a plain black dress for the rest of the day. I usually had a few hours off in the afternoon. Every other Sunday was my free day, when I cycled to church at Howden then went home to spend some time with my own family. I looked forward to seeing my brother Brian who was still a toddler, and sometimes Dorothy, my sister, came for the weekend, bringing her camera. She worked as a lady's companion at Hornsea and took a lot of photographs to remind her of home. Looking back, our lives were regulated by our employers, but most people worked long hours and weren't used to a lot of freedom.

The kitchen was Isabel's domain. There was a big cast-iron range, a dresser stacked with china and a table that needed scrubbing every day with soda and boiling water. Next to the kitchen was a scullery where vegetables were washed and game was skinned and plucked, ready for cooking.

Every morning, Mrs. Scholfield came in to discuss the day's menus with Isabel, then Mr. Jenner, the gardener, brought fruit and vegetables from the kitchen garden, with grapes and fresh figs out of the glasshouses. There was milk, butter, eggs and cream from the farm and meat from the estate. Fish was delivered by post every Thursday from Grimsby, to be eaten on Friday. The food was good because it was always fresh and full of flavour. Isabel used her expertise to make the sauces and desserts and I particularly remember her home-made ice-cream.

We ate the same food as the family. If they had roast pheasant for lunch, so did we. Our dining-room, called the servants' hall, had a large bay window overlooking a small yard and faced the entrance to the walled garden.

The Scholfields didn't do a lot of entertaining, but during the shooting season, local worthies like Mr. Pilling and Doctor Frank Wigglesworth were invited for a shoot, organised by the gamekeeper Mr. Sedgewick, who lived across the park at Wood Cottage. The guests always included Mr. Gore-Booth, who was Mr. Scholfield's brother-in-law. After the day's sport, the dead birds were hung from the ceiling in the Game Larder and a brace of pheasants or a hare was given to every tenant on the estate. We had jugged hare in port wine for lunch in the shooting season.

After war was declared in 1939, some evacuees from Hull came to stay at the Hall and occupied a couple of the rooms near ours on the second floor. There was Mrs. Train with her two children, Jean and Arthur, and three more; Pat Cockrel, Audrey Hairsine and Joan Turgoose. They stayed until 1942 and after they returned to their homes in Hull, I believe Norah kept in touch with some of them and Isabel corresponded with Mrs. Train.

The war changed everything and Mr. and Mrs. Scholfield lost most of their workers to various war-time occupations, although older men like my father worked there until they retired. When the domestic staff began to leave, Dulcie joined the W.R.A.F. In 1941, I left to get married and started a new life.

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