

# Darvell Past and Present

## By Harry Bashford

### Acknowledgement

I am indebted to David Martin, President of our Local Archaeological Society for his research and supplying such interesting information concerning the past history of Darvell.

### Foreword

Having spent forty-two years of my working life at Darvell, forty as Head Gardener, I was interested in the suggestion made by the Brothers that the story concerning Darvell should be written.

I hope those reading it will find it of interest, as I found it rewarding writing and reliving what was to me such a worthwhile experience.

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### Darvell Past

Darvell Hall – formerly known as Darvell Bank, before that as Newhouse and before that as Buckhams – the original house was built in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Modifications took place in 1722 and it was much enlarged in 1881. These dates appear on the north frontage of the building now known as the Woodcrest House. Mrs. Layton owned Darvell Hall – and before the outbreak of World War I had a large house built in Robertsbridge – at the junction of Langham and Bellhurst Road – naming it (not surprisingly) Darvell Bank.

Darvell Hall stood empty all through the 1914 – 1918 war except that German prisoners were housed there – doing agricultural work on local farms.

The only staff employed was a caretaker gardener – and casual work on Saturday mornings and school holidays was done by Sid Woodgate, who many years later became my deputy.

Mrs. Layton, by the way, outlived three husbands (who said that woman was the weaker vessel?). The husbands consisted of two Hudson's (probably brothers) and finally a Mr. Layton. The enlargement carried out in 1881 would have been done by the first of the two Hudsons.

Darvell Hall in the happier pre-war days was a showplace – well staffed with gardeners – with beautiful gardens and grounds – and was thrown open to the public each summer – with a local band in attendance.

### Change of Ownership

Darvell was put on the market in 1919. It consisted of the main residence, coach house and stables with coachman's flat above, extensive farm buildings, and gardens and grounds and surrounding pastures – totalling some fifty acres.

This was purchased by E. H. Chambers, a very successful fruit grower from Boughton Monchelsea, Kent. The price paid, which today sounds unbelievable, was £4000. This would now be the price of a decent cottage. I did hear the price paid by the East Sussex County Council a year or so later for its use as a Sanatorium, but prefer not to mention it: suffice it to say that a considerable profit was made by Mr. Chambers.

Before purchasing Darvell, E. H. Chambers acquired the Great Sanders Estate at Seddlescombe. This comprised a mansion with beautiful grounds and where my Father had

been head Gardener for many years. I served under him on leaving school, until joining the Army and going to France in the First World War. Great Sanders house and a few surrounding acres were sold to a gentleman from Pembury, Kent, who brought his own garden staff. Consequently my father was transferred to Darvell and lived in the Coachman's flat until the Lodge became available. I was in France when hostilities ceased, and early in 1919 was released from the Army having agreed to work on the land on returning to England.

E. H. Chambers had planted fruit on all suitable land on the Great Sanders Estate, and it was here, quite close to my old home, that I started to work, finding lodgings near by. Then followed a chain of circumstances that was to have an important part to play in my future life.

One of the gardeners brought from Pembury moved in to the same cottage where I had lived for fourteen years – a Mr. Ellis, who had a daughter Violet. By chance we met. This to me was my first and only love. Unfortunately there was “a fly in the ointment”. Violet was only seventeen and still had her hair down her back, whilst I, a First World War veteran, was five years her senior. This was an embarrassment, and so my courting was done preferably after dark, round secluded country lanes, as I had no wish to be accused of kidnapping.

My Father, who was no mean judge of character, had a great regard for Mr. Chambers, and regarded him as a very astute businessman. Money was not his God. To him each purchase was a challenge, with an attending risk. I don't know if he was psychic or had inside information previous to his purchases.

As regards the Great Sanders Estate, this was a vast Catchment area. Was he advised that the Hastings Corporation had it in mind for constructing a large reservoir? As regards Darvell, had he foreseen that the East Sussex County Council considered this ideally suited and situated for use as a Sanatorium? We don't know the answer to these questions. What is known is that in both cases this is exactly what happened – and his bank balance must have benefited by many thousands of pounds.

My brother, two years my senior, had enlisted at the outbreak of war and served in France for four years. He was now released from the Army and joined my parents to assist in the gardens at Darvell. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1921 I commenced work at Darvell and my brother was transferred to act as foreman on the fruit farm at Great Sanders. Preparations were now being made to receive patients at the Sanatorium by May.

Accommodation was of a temporary nature – mostly ex-Army huts and other wooden shelters. Dingley Ward was rather more sophisticated and catered for male patients who were too ill to go into the more temporary type of shelters. The East Sussex County Council was fortunate as regards purchasing Darvell (now to be known as Darvell Hall Sanatorium). The main building, which is now known as “Woodcrest House”, was adapted for use as the Board room, Matron’s office, nurses dining room, domestic staff dining room, kitchen, vegetable room and dairy. Later the patients’ dining room was added, with serving hatch from the kitchen. The upper floor consisted of Matron’s private apartment, nurses and domestic staff sleeping accommodation, etc. The coach house and stable was converted and used for X-ray and a small operating theatre, a later extension provided office accommodation for the medical superintendent. This building is now known as the Alm.

The farm buildings were used to house twenty pigs. The Cow stalls were converted to store potatoes. In a good year we grew about 15 tons.

As regards the permanent buildings, these were built later as money became available, and consisted of a ward, now called Clearwater. A second ward was Meads Ward, now known as Deer Spring and Crystal Spring. Then there was a large block consisting of office and stores, recreation room, occupational therapy department, carpenters shop, library and toilets. This block is now known as Cotswold. And finally the Hostel, now named Childrens House and School.

As mentioned previously, the Council was fortunate as regards well built permanent buildings existing at Darvell, but as regards the large acreage of surrounding meadows, these were somewhat of an embarrassment. Certain areas were gainfully used, three and a half acres being ploughed and cultivated for growing vegetables and soft fruit and maintained a supply sufficient to meet the needs of the 150 patients and staff all the year round. A further two acres south of the Cottage was planted with apple trees, which on maturing produced sufficient for our own needs – surpluses were transferred to other hospitals in the Group. As regards the remaining areas, sufficient hay was made for the requirements of our farm horse. And fifty sheep were brought in annually to graze.

I came to Darvell to work as I thought in the gardens. They unhappily no longer existed. One doesn’t need a lot of imagination to picture what happens when nature is allowed to take over for five years. Lawns, which previously had been well maintained, were now a tangled mass of dead and living grass and surrounding paths merged with them. The drive was no more than a farm track and was only identified by the wheel marks of vehicles, all in all a pretty depressing prospect.



It was no easy task getting the lawn areas back to where a mower could deal with them. There were no rotary type mowers available in those days, which can deal with long grass. So the scythe had to be used, laboriously, and eventually mowing by machine was possible.

There were no motor mowers available – the mower was pulled by a pony, which had to be led and had specially made leather boots to prevent hoof marks in the lawn. Some two or three years later we had one of the first motor mowers: a 21” Atco. We did hear that Dr. Penn Milton, our first Medical Superintendent had this delivered without Committee sanction and was threatened with surcharge.

Dr. Penn Milton was a tall athletic type, a keen golfer, who spent a lot of his time practicing in the surrounding meadows, and one never knew when one of these little white missiles would skim perilously close over your head. We also heard that at one time he was champion swimmer of the West of England. Thinking of him as an athletic, sporty type made it more difficult to imagine that after a long illness and only being with us for two years, he would have died. When Dr. Penn Milton became ill, Dr. J. R. Dingley, a young unmarried man, came to Darvell as a locum.

After Dr. Penn Milton’s death, Dr. Dingley was appointed Medical Superintendent. At the age of 18 Dr. Dingley had T.B. from which he fully recovered and was a living example to his patients of what could be achieved by carrying out the prescribed treatment coupled no doubt with a certain amount of good fortune.

About a year after his appointment, he married Dr. Ruth, a highly qualified doctor. And what a marvellous partnership this proved to be. They lived at Darvell for a year or so – and Janet, their first child, was born here. Some time later a large house was built on the west side of the Lodge, which they occupied until their retirement. Two more daughters were born there. Testimony to their medical skill and good nursing is born out by the number of their patients still surviving, including Dorothy Brooks who lives in Heathfield Gardens and recently celebrated her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday.

### Treatment of Patients

On admission patients were kept in bed, examined and X-rayed. They were allowed up as their condition improved. All were issued with a rulebook, and one rule that was strongly emphasized, read: “If you are out walking and are caught in the rain, remember it won’t hurt you to get wet, but it will, to hurry.”

Walks were carefully planned with distances to suit the condition of the patient. Seats round the drive were numbered 1 – 2 – 3 and allocated according to the fitness of the patient. Longer walks included one known as Langham Loop. This took them out of the drive, up [Knelle?] Road, turning left into Langham Road to where it joined Brightling Road. Then they would come down the hill and back home round the drive. The longest walk, known as Farm Circle, took them round the drive, up Brightling Road to the entrance to Scalands, and back through the fields down an easy gradual slope to Darvell.

Occupational therapy played an important part in the patients’ recovery. We were fortunate in having a Miss Ridgeway in charge of this department, along with Miss McDermott, her assistant. Before being allowed up, patients were instructed in cane work of various sorts. Not all of them accepted this with good grace. As their health improved, slightly heavier tasks were allocated. They peeled potatoes and cleaned the ablution block and recreation room. Some worked in the Carpenters Shop. These duties were allocated by Dr. Dingley at a 9 a.m. parade with Tom Couling making a note of Doctor’s instructions.

Matron or a Sister would be responsible for what the women patients did. According to the season, the women patients sliced runner beans and shelled peas. The majority of these women patients would have come from urban areas – and would in most cases have seen peas only from a tin or a packet. Occasionally whilst opening a pod of peas, they would see one small maggot, and with a scream throw the whole pod away with eight or more good peas still in it. Having had to battle against weather and pests to produce the peas, this cavalier behaviour was not appreciated.

Following the War, T.B. -- or the white plague as it was sometimes called -- reached its peak in the late 1920’s and despite first class medical attention and dedicated nursing, deaths were all too frequent. The mortuary discretely sited adjoining West Lane [?] was occupied all too often. To avoid any possible distress to the patients, undertakers were requested to carry out their duties whenever possible after dark, using West Lane to the farm; from there to the drive, on the north side of what was the boiler house and laundry in our time, and is now the Brothers workshop.

### The Edgar Hut

In 1925 a Miss Edgar took over as our new Matron, a quite remarkable person who had served with distinction during the 1914 – 1918 War in Italy for which she was decorated.

Soon after her arrival, Miss Edgar realized the urgent need for a building that could cater in a communal way for both patients and staff. There was no doubting the need for such a building. The problem was financing the project. Wars have to be paid for in cash as well as lives, and stringent economics were the order of the day. Manual workers wages were reduced from fifty shillings to thirty-five shillings a week. Those living at the time will well remember the Geddes Axe which made savage cuts in all directions. And it was obvious that there would be no financial assistance from official sources. So it was a case of do it yourself or do without.

Miss Edgar was not the sort of person to do without anything which she considered worthwhile if there was a possible chance of achieving it. And so various fundraising schemes were put into operation, and sufficient money raised to purchase a wooden building which became available on the outskirts of London. Tom Couling, our ex-patient Carpenter, supervised its dismantling. It was then transported to Darvell, and with the assistance of our male staff helping with the heavier tasks; the remainder of the work was carried out by patient labour. The exception was the tiling, which was done by a local builder.

The building was well planned. The stage and dressing rooms occupied the south end. At the north end were the shop and canteen complete with serving hatches. The floor space between was gainfully used: sometimes by the staff for badminton in the winter, and all the year round on visiting days, when it looked very attractive with individual tables and brightly coloured table cloths. The shop catered for the everyday needs of patients and staff. Paid ex-patients mostly ran the shop. Voluntary ladies from the locality staffed the canteen, which functioned regularly on visiting days.

The Sanatorium took in patients from the whole of East Sussex as well as Hastings, so visitors would in some cases have travelled long distances. Especially during winter months, they must have appreciated coming to the canteen and enjoying afternoon tea before facing the journey home.

### The Walled Garden

This was an unusual garden. I understand there are only two others of the same type in the Country.

It was cleverly constructed with curved or squiggly walls which were not built in this unusual way just to be different. Firstly, there was a considerable saving in bricks. Had they been straight, a nine-inch wall would have been necessary, whereas the curves gave sufficient strength that a four and a half inch wall was sufficient.

Another great advantage was the protection the curves provided from the wind, giving added warmth which would be especially appreciated by the more exotic fruits such as nectarines and peaches. These were grown on the south facing walls; Morello cherries were quite happy on the north facing walls; plums in variety occupied the east and west facing walls. There were two large rectangular plots of cultivated ground, with a centre and surrounding paths with brick edgings.

Each plot had eight cordon type pear trees trained up to seven feet and then branching at the top to meet its neighbour. Surrounding each plot were espalier type apples. All these trees, trained in this way, produced fruit of the highest quality and demonstrated garden skills of a very high order.

This sort of skill was expected of gardeners in private employment, where the owners demanded the best and were prepared to pay for it. Ours was a different proposition. We hadn't unlimited staff or financial backing for luxurious projects. Our priorities were finding vegetables and fruit for 150 people all the year round, plus keeping the large pleasure grounds in a presentable state for the enjoyment of patients, staff and visitors.

And so with reluctance all the fruit trees in the walled garden were removed, to make way for nursery beds on which vegetable plants were raised and later transplanted to the field. It was also used for raising wallflowers etc. for spring bedding and one area was reserved for growing annuals for cut flowers. As regards the walled garden, I'm sure the Brothers had the same reluctance in removing the walls to make way for the new building, Valley View, as we in removing those marvellously trained fruit trees to accommodate more essential subjects.

### The Fruit Room

This was situated on the same floor as the coachman's flat – in the block known to us as the Clinic, now renamed Alm. The room was reached by ascending an exterior flight of steps.

Well-constructed racks for storing fruit reached from floor to ceiling and on the front were printed cards giving the names of the apples and pears stored there. Almost all the pears grown in England originated in France, as their names suggest. Louise Bonne de Jersey, Marie Louise, Beurre Hardy, Williams' Bon Chretien, Duchesse de Bordeaux and one unequalled for flavour, Doyenne du Comice. No doubt some of these varieties would have been grown on the cordon-trained trees in the Walled Garden.

Apples had attractive names: Northern Greening, Winter Queening, Duchess of Oldenburg, Christmas Pearmain, Ribston Pippin, Golden Russet, Ellison, Grange [or is it Orange?], Blenheim Orange.\* Sadly, these have mostly disappeared from today's catalogues. On rare occasions they might be found in some of the few remaining large gardens.

A small space in the fruit room was reserved for medlars. There was one tree of this unusual fruit in the orchard here. This fruit was not attractive in appearance: of a brownish colour with a large eye, it was gathered in September and stored until October. By then they were quite rotten and ready to be eaten providing you had the courage. I only tried them once and that was quite sufficient. In an Encyclopaedia of Gardening given to me by my father and dated 1860, when apparently this fruit was popular, it suggests that they should be eaten when bletted or in a state of incipient decay. These words may sound more acceptable than rotten, but I doubt if it improved the flavour.

It was unfortunate that the fruit room which was well adapted and convenient couldn't have been in a more unsuitable position: facing south, high off the ground, with hardly any humidity. The ideal fruit store (room) would have been found in most of the very large gardens, where up to eighteen gardeners would have been employed. The unmarried ones would have been housed on the estate in what was known as a bothy – and would be found in fruit and vegetables, the value of which probably deducted from their wages. The head gardener, who seldom soiled his hands, would supervise these extensive gardens on horseback. The fruit store would be constructed on an earth floor. The roof and sides were mostly thatched with heather. This gave perfect storing conditions with the correct temperature and humidity.

### Christmas Activities

Pre-Christmas days were pretty hectic. Those taking part in the pantomime, apart from their routine duties, would be taking part in rehearsals. The garden staff was responsible for decorating the Edgar Hut, putting up Christmas trees, and collecting evergreens and holly.

Each year, preferably on Christmas Eve, after the patients had gone to bed, we toured the wards singing carols. We enjoyed singing them and most of the patients enjoyed hearing them. There was the rare exception. A night nurse doing her final round before going off duty in the morning following our carols, mentioned to one of the men patients how fortunate we had been having such lovely weather. To this he replied, “Have they been round? They didn’t wake me up.” Ah, well, you can’t please them all.

The staff party included gathering round a large Christmas tree erected in the Edgar Hut. And on this tree was a small present of a somewhat unusual nature for every member of the Staff. Dr. Dingley made no secret of the fact that he had a very poor memory, so anything of importance was written into what was known as his little book. When the presents were handed out, some of the Doctor’s comments with them made us realize that if his memory was poor, his power of observation was pretty good. During the year he must have noticed certain happenings concerning each member of the staff; and made an appropriate comment, which no doubt kept us on our toes.

I remember one Christmas being presented with a toy axe, doctor commenting that I was never happier than when cutting down trees. This was not strictly true. There was one occasion, however, when it certainly did apply. A member of the House Committee on a routine visit and garden inspection surprised me by making the following suggestion. There was an Araucaria (Monkey Puzzle tree) at the bottom of the drive. I was instructed to borrow a large auger from the Carpenters Shop, bore three sloping holes into the centre, fill them with neat [meaning undiluted] arsenical weed killer, and then cork them up. To say I was surprised at this nefarious suggestion would be to put it mildly. But (for my sins) I was quite happy to do it as I, as much as he detested these scaly monsters which seemed quite foreign to our lovely Sussex countryside. The dark deed having been done, there was nothing to do but wait results. Apparently, Araucarias don’t give up readily, as it was the end of the following summer when it finally succumbed. At a subsequent committee meeting, the gentleman in question – no doubt with tears in his eyes – reported with regret that the tree in question had died and that the gardeners be instructed to remove it. So Dr.

Dingley at least was right on this occasion when suggesting that I was never happier than when cutting down trees. What really surprised me concerning this affair was that a member of the Committee – and a Justice of the Peace at that – should connive with a common gardener. It would seem that a mutual dislike is a common leveller.

## World War II

If we look at a map showing the coastline between Dover and Eastbourne, it is obvious that had the threatened invasion taken place, we should have been very much in the front line. Mercifully this didn't happen and to everyone's surprise and relief, very little happened for over a year.

This breathing space allowed for various defence measures to be taken which included the formation of The Home Guard. Most of the male staff (excluding the male nurses) were members. Sid Woodgate had for many years been a member of the St. Johns Ambulance. About two years after returning from the First World War, I joined the Observer Corps, later to become the Royal Observer Corps. So we had been in training for many years, and fully operational at the outbreak of war.

Dr. Dingley, apart from being a credit to the Medical profession, was also very public spirited and over the years was Scoutmaster, President of our local musical and dramatic Society, and was made Commander of the local Home Guard Battalion, with its Headquarters at Darvell. Miss Hourd [sp?], our Administrator, acted as his Secretary.

No doubt we all at some time or other suffer embarrassing moments, and Dr. Dingley on a rather special occasion certainly did. A mass parade of Sussex Battalions with all the Brass Hats present was held in the park at Howards Heath. Most of the Battalions had already arrived, when Dr. Dingley, proudly marching at the head of his battalion, led them to their allotted space. He faced his Battalion, and then the awful thing happened. Instead of giving the command, “Halt,” in a very loud voice, he shouted “Whoa!” Had he been in charge of a cavalry detachment it would certainly have been more relevant, but still unacceptable. There were many red faces in the Battalion that day and none more so than Dr. Dingley's.

We will remember the glorious summer of 1940 and with it the Battle of Britain: cloudless skies except for the vapour trails left by patrolling fighter planes. Fortunately we escaped the bombing, and no doubt patients and others watched with interest when crews



from German bombers parachuted to safety. Our more hazardous moments occurred when the V1's (or the flying bombs or doodle bugs as we called them) arrived. In the Royal Observer Corps we had been alerted and given the code word “Diver” to be used when reporting them. I'm not prepared to guess as to the number of V1's we plotted and reported during the attack. Here at Darvell we were very much involved. The V1's kept to defined lanes, en route to London. One of the lanes was directly overhead, with two on either side. It was inevitable that considering the many hundreds of bombs that passed over – and quite a few brought down by our fighters – the only casualty in our area was when one came down in a hop garden in Poppinghole Lane, killing the tractor driver. These bombs made a sinister noise when approaching, to which animals reacted. Our cat, named Smuggler, started life as a very small kitten in the Stokehole at Darvell: hence his name. He was a better warning than the siren: if indoors, long before we had heard anything, he would creep under the settee as the bomb approached.

Darvell's most hazardous incident occurred late one Sunday afternoon. I was at home and noticed the bomb which had obviously been hit by one of our fighters and was slowing, losing height and heading straight for Darvell. Fortunately it came down and exploded in one of the Glottenham hop gardens, about a quarter of a mile from Meads Ward. The blast did considerable damage to windows, and inside the wards sputum mugs and water jugs on lockers overturned – quite a slam. Yes, it must have been a terrifying experience for the women bed-patients. All staff on or off duty assisted in restoring order.

### Cooks and Hindrances

Over the years we had a number of changes in the kitchen. The cooks worked in pairs and were well qualified as regards the culinary art. As regards their age, most were over thirty. One notable exception was when two bright and attractive young things – perhaps too young – were appointed. I rather feel that quite often their concentration was not as good as it should have been and they were probably thinking more about their boyfriends who would be calling for them in the evening than the job in hand.

I was responsible for going to the kitchen each morning and learning what their requirements as to fruit and vegetables might be for that particular day. Having then given instructions to the men as to what was required, I returned to whatever task I had at the time. On many occasions I was summoned to the kitchen a second time, and various items



asked for which had been overlooked at my first visit. It was a long way to the kitchen garden, and when busy as I mostly was, this to me was an aggravating and unnecessary waste of time, which eventually made me put pen to paper and compose the following:

We have two cooks at Darvell Hall:  
One a blonde and rather small,  
And one brunette and stately tall.  
I've no desire to judge their cooking,  
Nor yet deny they're both good looking.  
My only grievance that's worth booking  
Is herein penned below.

As gardener here my work had been --  
(Before these cooks came on the scene)  
To keep the lawns all neat and green  
And help the cabbages to grow,  
As well as turnips, white as snow.  
But now it seems I hardly know  
What is my occupation.

Each morn I to the kitchen go  
And ask in quiet voice and low,  
What is required for the day.  
And when I hear the head cook say  
The things most needed, I just pray  
Her memory hasn't failed her.

Its, "Harry, will you fetch me two  
Or three turnips for nurse's stew,  
A cauliflower for Doctor's lunch,  
A Blenheim orange for me to munch,"  
Then wonder why I grumble.

And so shall end my tale of woe  
When bright-eyed daisies o'er me grow.  
In well-earned rest I'll then forget  
Those cooks who meant so well, but yet  
Caused me such life-long worry.

The cooks were amused at my little effort. But life went on very much as before.

### Final Gleanings

To end this part of my story without mentioning “The Friends of Darvell” would be doing a grave injustice to a group of voluntary workers who over the years were instrumental in raising a considerable sum of money which provided those extras which would not have been forthcoming from official sources.

Many of the trees and shrubs which give pleasure today, including all those in the area known as “The Friends Garden” were purchased with money donated by The Friends. Funds were raised through donations – life members, ordinary members -- and through our annual Fete which was held on August Bank Holiday. This was our main fundraising effort. I was Honourable Treasurer for a number of years and looking up one of the cash books, found our annual income from this source would have been something over £200. Apart from financial success, the Fete acted as a reunion for patients, ex-patients and a great number of local and other people who supported loyally year after year.

Darvell must hold what might be described as the unenviable record concerning the number of trees struck by lightning. A very large Cedar close to the house on the lawn towards what was the Walled Garden was struck on three occasions, and had to be taken down. Two Oaks were struck near the reservoir. The only other evergreen, a large fir close to the top of the drive, was struck and had to be removed. A large sweet chestnut close to our garden shed next to our vegetable garden was struck. The top crashed through the roof of our mess room. Fortunately it was empty at the time. Finally, an oak in the Friends Garden was struck quite recently, which no doubt some of the Brothers will remember.

Why Darvell should be singled out by storms for special attention we don't know. One of my sons whose work is associated with the weather has suggested that the high iron content in the soil could be a contributing factor. What I have written need not cause concern to the residents, as no one has ever been injured.

Jimmy Pinyon, an ex-patient and our engineer for a number of years, was a first class photographer and a great bird lover. When confined to bed in the open fronted shelters, he coaxed robins, tits and others to take food from his hand. Later in his workshop during the winter months, a large sack of peanuts would be in evidence [presumably to feed the birds]. I should add that at that time they were not two shillings a pound.

Following the retirement of Dr. and Mrs. Dingley, Dr. May and Dr. Sutton were appointed. Sadly, Dr. Sutton died. Dr. May stayed until the Closure.

### Darvell Present

Tuberculosis had by the 1960's been almost mastered, and what had been Darvell Hall Sanatorium since 1921, now became Darvell Hall Hospital. Patients were now admitted who had complaints of a terminal nature. This must have been somewhat distressing to the staff who would be aware that despite dedicated nursing, there was very little chance of a patient recovering.

During 1970 very few patients were admitted, and it became uneconomical to keep the hospital open. It was finally closed down in 1971 and Darvell was put on the market. Village life thrives on rumours and these flew around like autumn leaves when it became known that Darvell was up for sale. We heard that an open prison was being considered, and a home for delinquents was also mentioned. A housing estate was also being considered. Had any of these suggestions materialized, Darvell as I had known it would have no longer existed. There was always a good relationship between Darvell and the local people, who therefore were very interested in what the future held.

Eventually we learned that Darvell had been purchased by what was understood to be The Society of Brothers. I'm sure that no one in this area had ever heard of “The Brothers”, and country people with their usual reticence were more than a little curious and possibly suspicious as to what sort of people our new neighbours might be. Well, we didn't have to wait very long to discover that our neighbours at Darvell were very friendly, hospitable and generous people.

A good many will remember (myself included) that when the workshop first became operational, the timber imported from Europe was only roughly sawn in plank. The off-cuts were then contained in bundles, with ingenious rubber bands made from inner tubes. Those with transport were allowed to collect and no charge made. Elderly people in the village had this very useful wood delivered to their doors. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end. So when prepared maple was imported from the States, the supply of kindling wood dried up. We were all very grateful for it whilst it lasted.

There is little doubt that the good relationship between Darvell and the surrounding area was fostered by the open days and even more so the great number of people invited to the Christmas festivities. These were happy occasions and much enjoyed. These evenings mostly closed with a Nativity play. Quite often in these plays a large doll has to suffice – but not so at Darvell. Always it was a baby and a very well behaved baby at that. Never once have they cried. Is it the environment that they are reared in that makes them so contented?

It was mentioned earlier how fortunate the E.S.C.C. were in purchasing Darvell with well built existing buildings. The Brothers were even more fortunate, as other buildings were erected which they adapted and made full use of. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II a further building programme was authorised. A new nurses home was being erected, but with the outbreak of war it was suspended. All this was unfortunate, but in one way it may have favoured the Brothers. Included in the proposed building programme was a ward almost identical to Meads. It would have replaced Dingley Ward. Had this happened, the Brothers would have been deprived of the ideal site with its central position on which the large building comprising dining hall, kitchen and stores now stands, known as the Rhön. Apart from the Rhön and Valley View, it has not been necessary to break fresh ground to accommodate such a large family, which shows how sensibly existing buildings were adapted or enlarged. Over the years I have regularly visited Darvell, occasionally on request for advice, and have been impressed and gratified concerning the maintenance of the gardens and grounds.

Being blessed with more workers than I was allowed, certain areas have been made more attractive with extra borders of roses, herbaceous plants and annuals. Of all the advantages in taking over what had been a private establishment to me the area of glass greenhouses puts and cold frames proved of great value. The potting shed butted on to both greenhouses and I'm not prepared to guess as to how many hours I spent in it – or how many thousands of seedlings were pricked off or plants potted on in it.

I rather envied the gardeners that worked in it when privately owned. At that time a large boiler would be functioning during the winter months – heating the greenhouse and pits and making life in the potting shed very pleasant. Another advantage was a trap door leading into the greenhouse which allowed seedlings and plants to be handed through and not have to face the elements. The potting shed is worthy of special mention.

This was probably by the first of the two Hudsons in the 1800's and was retained when the surrounding greenhouses and frames were removed and the area landscaped. This was another of the many worthwhile ideas the Brothers had – the potting shed making an attractive feature and at the same time symbolizing perfectly Darvell Past and Present.

It is interesting that with the recent purchase of surrounding meadows, the Darvell estate is the same now as when privately owned, excluding the two fields previously included in the Scalands Farm. Despite Dr. Dingley's suggestion that I was never happier than when cutting down trees, if we look around, Darvell is well favoured with both

evergreens and hardwoods, which are mostly oaks. Of all the oaks, one deserves special mention. It stands about fifty feet from what was the southwest corner of the walled garden. It is a massive tree. I remember putting a tape measure round its girth: it measured thirty feet. Looking at this tree made one feel very humble and at the same time trying to recall how many of our Kings and Queens would have been born and passed on since this tree started life as an acorn. It might well be that children at Darvell as yet unborn will outlive this noble tree – and then thought might be given to erecting a plaque commemorating the tree’s existence and at the same time remembering all those who over the years have stood and admired and passed on.

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