

Beryl Reed's Memories

I was given this interesting account of the life, in 1936, of Beryl Williams (nee Reed, who now lives in Rock. She lived at 11 Penvorda Cottages, St Breward, with her parents, sister and two brothers, at this time. She agreed to let me copy her memoirs and wishes me to give them to our History Group archive.

Beryl is now 92 years old and not too well, but still keeps in touch with her sister, Mavis Found, who lives near St Austell. Sadly, both her brothers who emigrated to South Africa in the late 1930s, have died.

The Reed family were great friends of our family, as they lived side by side at Penvorda. My sister and I keep in close contact with both Beryl and Mavis.

*Trevor Ternouth
May 2014*

“It was destined that I would leave school at the age of 14 to go into service. So, previous to this, my mother had bought from a drapery shop in Bodmin (namely Lawrence's) a full set of uniform for the occasion. For the morning duties it had to be a pink dress, large white apron which reached the bottom of the dress and had a 'bib' top. The material of the dress might have been 'drill' – I'm not sure. A white mob cap, stiff detachable (celluloid?) cuffs for the dress. Black low-heeled shoes. Black stockings.

For the afternoon work, which was more attuned to parlour-maid duties, it had to be a black dress, shoes and stockings with a tiny waist apron in white with a lacy, or fancy, edge trimmings. The cap was really a front band in tiara shape, which matched the apron.

It was arranged that I would leave school when the Christmas holiday began. However, my employers Captain and Mrs Vereker, decided that I was needed sooner. So, two weeks before Christmas I had gone home from school for my dinner, when my mother told me that she had had a telegram saying that someone was coming for me that evening. So I never went back to school again. It seemed like an adventure at the time, to be old enough to leave school and earn money. As my sister was already working for these people, it was quite a comforting thought.

Little did I know of the hard work it was, just to earn six shillings and eight pence (30p) per week, out of which I had to pay my mother half for all the uniforms. We were up at 7 a.m. and went to bed approximately 10.30 p.m. On call all day. Our free time was one half day a week, after all the jobs were done, and every alternate Sunday. Then we cycled seven miles to our home at St Breward. We were not given time off together – one of us had to be on duty.

In those days the Manor was a huge, formidable place. The dining room had a slate floor, as did all the downstairs. Panelled in oak was the dining room and maybe the back passage. Huge latticed windows everywhere. The cooking was done by my sister, and that was on a gas stove. The gas was a mystery to us as huge machinery was housed in a shed and some huge iron round plates were wound up on a pulley. As

the gas was being used so these weights gradually lowered. When they reached the bottom we had no power. If Captain Vereker was not available, one of us would have to wind as well as we could manage. It was an awfully hard thing to do. Like cranking a car – but much, much heavier. The hot water system was by a combustion stove. Woebetide us if it clinkered and went out overnight. When the water wasn't hot, Captain Vereker would shout from the top of the stairs all manner of language. Being Irish he had a quick temper.

Mrs Dulcie Vereker was a moody person. What was right today could be wrong tomorrow. They had five children, three of whom were away at college when I went there. They came home for holidays, which meant a lot more work. The boys were no trouble but the younger daughter, who was youngest of all, had made up her mind we were inferior beings! She was the least likeable. When the three had gone back to college we usually had an old woman from the village and her granddaughter visit the Manor. It was usual for her to bring with her a basket with swede turnips in. When we answered the door her usual greeting was "Ere's zum turmuts fer ya". Knowing the procedure we would then call Mrs Vereker, who would bring a bundle of children's clothes for her to take home. Hence the turnips!

My work in the mornings was all the cleaning jobs. I can well remember having to polish the stairs from top to bottom quite often. Especially if there was to be Bridge Party. It was a monthly event at the Manor as four ladies played weekly in each other's house. Now and again they held a large Bridge Party in the drawing room. When the weekly ones met at the Manor, Captain Vereker would go out shooting. He was especially good at shooting woodcock, which apparently are hard to shoot on account of their darting flight.

The drawing room was seldom used. It had a Grand Piano in it which Mrs Vereker's mother used to come from next door to play. Sheelagh, the daughter, could play it. This spelling of her name is the Irish way. The door from the dining room through to the drawing room was of heavy oak and iron studs or bolts. The room on the left of the front door was known as the Blue Room. This was the one that was really in use always. Not as big as the other rooms. I think that one was carpeted. In the hall there were coconut door mats. My sister and I well remember those, for when the family were out and the floors newly polished, we used to take in turns sitting on them and pulling each other along!

The small room by the back hall was the 'gun room'. All relevant gear and outdoor gear was kept there. This led into Captain Vereker's father's room when the old Major came to stay for long periods. He was quite a character. Very deaf and spent most of his time with his collection of butterflies from all over the world. He had them all in presentation chests. He was also fond of betting on the race horses and would often make his way with great difficulty to the 'phone. We would hear him talking to himself as he walked with a stick saying "Oh yes and that's that, oh yes and that's that", repeating it all the while. He only came of his room for meals, so not a lot of cleaning could be done in that room until he left the Manor. Then it was a hard task. On one occasion I well remember he left on a Friday which was officially the day the kitchen had to be given a good clean. This particular day we thought it was usual for the Major's room to be cleaned as soon as he left. So, what were we to do? We put most of the time to the Major's room, which Captain and Mrs Vereker were

away. How wrong we were! Mrs Vereker was not in a good mood and we were told off for not doing the kitchen. Finally I exploded and asked her if she thought we didn't do anything whilst she was away? The following day when we were cleaning the kitchen on her orders, she was too affluent in her praise to me, so I gave her a very icy look and she took herself out of the kitchen!

The elder daughter, Joy, married Charles 'Mouse' St Aubyn and when she was due to have a baby, she came home to the Manor. The baby was a girl named Gay Carol (or Caroline) weighing 8lbs.

At the back of the house from the kitchen was a scullery and a large room called the Dairy. It had shelves of slate all the way around. Mice were prevalent in there and my sister and I had to set traps the like of which I had never seen before. They were three-hole traps and we wondered how many at a time we would catch. Any food left over from a meal was put on the slabs, which leads me to the fact that our meals were never served at the same time as the family. We had to wait and have any left over. If there wasn't anything, then we had to fend for ourselves. Should there be a lot left over, we often got into trouble for eating it, as they would have had it for next day or later. So we couldn't win, it really was 'upstairs, downstairs' life, but with only two indoor staff.

Quite often when the boy from the village delivered the milk from his farm he would pull the strings of my apron just as I was about to go from the kitchen down the steps to the dining room with a tray of food.

The bottom half of the kitchen walls on one side was lined with tin. It so happened that one day I was teaching my sister how to do the 'Palais Glide' – a dance. She being longer-legged than me, lifted her foot high and scratched one of the panels. I can't remember if anything was said by the family.

The Verekers grew polyanthus, anemones, mimosa (in the greenhouse) and pittesporum. This was boxed in a packing shed and sent off by rail from Port Isaac Road station, which was just a couple of fields away. People from the village were paid to help pick in the height of the season, as they only had a regular gardener by the name of Frank Prout from St Tudy. There were various sheds on the high ground at the back where our shared bicycle was kept. A tennis court was also in the grounds which was used a lot. The main drive entrance had tall granite pillars with granite balls on top, which looked impressive. Half way between the entrance and the Manor was a large pond with an island in it. Moorhens lived there. From there the drive rose up to the actual buildings which were on quite a high elevation, so that the Manor took pride of place.

At some stage – possibly 1938 – my sister left and a girl from St Tudy by name of Pearl Harper came and I took my sister's job. Later on the girl who worked for Mrs Radcliffe in the cottage left to get married to a boy from Trelill. She was Marjorie Smith from Kent. The boy was Sidney Keat. They are both still living, at Delabole (80 and 86). Pearl Harper is at St Tudy and married to Jack Sleeman. As all the Vereker children had left home at the start of the war, as did the Captain, I then was asked if I would work in the cottage, which I did. This was much easier and less work. In my place another girl who was from St Teath called Gwen (now Pluess)

went to the Manor. The two of us began a friendship with two St Teath boys. One night my boyfriend was seeing me to the back door whilst his pal waited by the pond. My boyfriend crept onto the grass after leaving me as to be as quiet as possible, when he was suddenly hit on the back of his head. Know the Captain's temper, my boyfriend Frank, though the boss had been lying in wait! When he and his pal went back to investigate, they realised it was an upturned rake which Frank had stepped on and the handle struck the blow. That joke has been the funniest memory of Trewarne. Another funny memory was when Sheelagh was wanting to be included in an important party for grown-ups. She had snatched a large tray of cocktail sausages from me, slipped on the polished slates and they all went flying.

Whilst my sister was there, we were both asked to go to a North Cornwall Hunt Ball in Bodmin to serve food. For this the Verekers bought us new afternoon aprons, caps and cuffs in a very pretty red/white/black check. We had never had anything so pretty. We enjoyed the event too.

For cleaning silver we used Goddards Plate Powder. The bath and sinks were cleaned with either Vim or a paste called Gumption. All the slate floors were polished, not too often, with a liquid mixture of beeswax, turpentine and Reckitts Blue. This had to be put on whilst liquid, with a huge clumsy block with a long handle, called a buffer. After applying, a felt pad was added, and that gave the shine. It had to be heaved to and fro like a pendulum.

These memories have been with me ever since I left school in 1936. I hope it will be of interest."