

Museum Project Response to: Mary Annings House 07 01 20121

‘The house, the shelter, the fundamental roof over our head, the home, that so many of us take for granted....’

The front door, the REAL front door led directly into the sitting room. It was sealed off, bolted shut. Painted with yellowing brilliant white gloss. There were draughty gaps round the edge of the frame, some so big you could see daylight on the other side as well as feeling a whistle of cold air. The new front door, huge brown and wooden was in a different place. It had a truncheon attached to the back, the internal side, attached by two circular springy brackets so that it could be pulled out at any opportunity. I never knew whether it was there as a joke, artwork, or a vicious form of self-defence. I'll never know now. It was always a standing joke at parties when people left, in a rather inebriated state. No strangers ever came, except the odd German cyclist on his way to Dover with a thin tent and tiny kettle. We lived in Kent, on Watling Street. A convenient stopping off place before the 50 mile haul to Dover. My Father loved those campers, showing them the old long disused reasonably flat tennis court, the outside loo and tap. My Mother often cooked them eggs and bacon in the morning.

Begin your journey here, by the new front door, on the west side of the house. There were 4 tan coir mats arranged in a huge rectangle for the porch. Utilitarian space. No coat hooks, no hall table. A step up onto parquet flooring, through the swing door into the newly formed huge kitchen. The old kitchen was a long sliver of a room, with a dolls house red topped table and a New World cooker. The cooker had shapely legs, maybe to go with its title. It was a new world in the early 60's. I was five when the new kitchen was built, double the size, same cooker, same table, and underfloor heating hidden beneath grey blue tiles. I loved it. My mother wanted a new kitchen, being a great cook, my father insisted that it was a bargain for a third child, well that was the story anyway. I never did quite work out the full logistics of that one, my sister a pawn to save a marriage where the father was out at work all day and my mother seemed to do little else but the washing, clean the silver, do the flowers and talk about the dog. My parents never did split up, but I am not sure my sister was the glue they both needed for their mutual emotional survival. She did teach me to make white sauce, a stew, and pastry though, valuable gifts for the pre jusrol age.

Back to the kitchen, the tiny cooker always had a vat of dog food bubbling on top of it, often a sheep's head would look out at you through the melting jelly. There was a hot tub, not the type of hot tub you would immediately think of 60 odd years later, but a hot tub top loader for the washing. There was a free standing spin dryer that walked

when it was turned on. I used to sit on it and enjoy the vibrations, it also meant I was higher up to the work surface, so my beady eye could always scan for goodies. A fish tank on a wobbly table, and in the autumn, a child sized white bucket of putrid smelling red liquid wrapped up in a pale pink electric blanket. This was the sacred vat of mulberry wine. Every morning my Father would appear, in shiny shoes and a baggy turn up suit, grasp the wooden pestle, the diameter and length of an adults thigh bone, and begin to stir it with military precision. This giant pestle was pink for most of its length. Only the handle was still left the colour of pale wood. He made a great ritualistic scene about it, especially as he knew how much my mother hated the disruption. She, by comparison installed a rabbit hutch on the corner counter where a wild local baby rabbit was convalescing after having escaped the jaws of our dog.

The red table was soon replaced with a much bigger blue formica- topped one, It had leaves at each end that never fitted properly, but it was a much better size. We had a tame bantam cockerel called Gregory Peck who was very partial to butter and also my Mother. He often came in through the window and stood on her head while she cooked. She loved it! One of her weekly jobs was 'doing the biscuits' on a Sunday afternoon. About 4 or 5 different varieties were selected from the tall rectangular rather rusty Peak Freen storage tins and transferred to a circular tin which was then put on the table for tea. We had to eat bread and butter before biscuits. No wonder we were all so fat.

The door from the kitchen led into the yard, where a pile of logs was always stored with architectural precision and covered in tarpaulin. Directly opposite the yard was as described, the little kitchen, a cold, and unwelcoming place, with a dog bed, a sink, and rows of shelves covered in Kilner jars of bottled plums and apple puree. Oh yes, chutney too, with corned beef. There was a shelf for sweet things, like angel delight and Rowntree's jelly. I used to steal squares and pretend I hadn't.

Concrete steps down from the little kitchen led into a piece of guest enhanced harmony and memories. This was the far sitting room, reserved only for visitors. The chair covers were white, the cushions velvet and the lovely fireplace warmed the room with its light. Gorgeous pink roses peeped through the windows from a rotting pergola from another unused door facing east, now blocked off with a curtain. This room was the butchers shop once, apparently. There was a meat hook in the middle of the ceiling.

A door from here led into the 'red room' called red because of the red cardinal paint on the concrete floor, it crept into the patterns of all the ancient rugs scattered around. I loved the patterns, stiff with dog hair and chilly memories. The chairs in the red room

were covered in dusty pink damask, An old wisteria plant knocked against the window on windy nights, precipitating fears for the use of the truncheon. The sofa was tiny, but I loved it; it had a nice shape. We had a telly! A brown box with 3 little dials and a screen about the size of an A4 piece of paper. I loved Pongo the dragon best. Behind the sofa there was a large oval table, often covered in a half finished engineering project and sported a huge Bakelite telephone. Our number was Southfleet 269. There were two cupboards in the red room, one for coats, miles away from the front door, and one under the stairs for old cloth cycling maps, boxes of scientific instruments and a gun. It was a great excitement to peep in there, we were never allowed. It was big enough to hide in too. So, the heart of the house, the central pivot, had 5 doors, one of which was the original front door. It had more doors than wall. Energy flowed in and out like water, no chance for a comfortable family love nest cuddle. That never happened.

The dining room led onto the porch, and back into the kitchen. The upstairs is another chapter.