

Lowerfield under the Densham tenure late 1940's to c.1977

(Most of the extracts below are from video footage (8 & 16mm) which have been transferred to video cassette tape and subsequently DVD - each stage losing some quality.)



A picture of the front of Lowerfield in the early 50's with Isabel Densham & Martin Densham.

The extension to the right of the current house was built in 1962/63 and I recall playing in it when it was under a foot of snow in the terrible winter of 1962/63.

The extension was built for Dudley Densham's parents Richard & Kathleen for whom Lapford Wood was becoming hard to manage in their senior years. Richard Densham died shortly after they had moved to Lowerfield.

There was a patch on the side of the left door. The Snowcem render/paint would crack and come off from time to time at various points on the house and the builders/painters would be around re-applying it.



Pictures of Lowerfield in the late 1940's. The first picture is taken from the main front door. The second is to the east of the main house before the first of the 4 main chicken houses were built. (Eventually there were two large houses for day old chicks to pullets; two large houses for laying hens. The chicks to pullets oldest house was to the east of the main house.) The third picture shows the tiny hen houses that existed before the large (battery cage!) hen houses were built. (Altogether there could be approximately 7,000 pullets/hens. The many tons of chicken poo were taken out every morning to be distributed (by hand shovel) as manure around the fields.)



The Lowerfield kitchen garden showing gardener Eddie Bibbings with Martin Densham late 1950's. The kitchen garden was Dudley Densham's pride and joy & he spent many hours tending it, soft fruits, apples, peaches, spuds, cauliflower and every vegetable one could imagine for all year round fresh food. He loved it but as a child I was somewhat less than enthusiastic about spending time working in it – or the shrubbery – or the lower orchard - or cutting any of the 5 lawns. However it provided some useful practical skills that I now use for the benefit of the National Trust.



Lapford Wood. Dudley's parents Richard & Kathleen Densham (née Luxton) lived at Lapford Wood after retiring from farming sometime

in the 1930's. The above picture shows (from right) Kathleen, Martin, Isabel and (I guess) Kathleen's mother.



The first picture above with steam trains passing on the Exeter Barnstable line in the 1950's just below Lapford Wood. The tennis court at Lapford Wood. The top of the driveway with Dudley's Riley car and lastly the front of the house showing the veranda. There was once a veranda overlooking the tennis court. It was unsafe in the 1950's but would have been a great vantage point from which to watch tennis. I recall Dudley describing that during WW2 the house was used as a small country hotel and VIP's (e.g. Viscount Mountbatten) would take the train down from London for a weekend of shooting/fishing/tennis – a brief respite from directing the war.

During the late 1950's I can only recall twice taking the steam train (probably a Southern Region West Country class) from Lapford to Exeter – great excitement for a small boy. I also recall waiting with Isabel at Lapford station platform one cold winter's evening awaiting someone's arrival. The train was late and the signalman invited us to keep warm in the signal box – the first time I had seen a proper coal fire – lovely and warm. (No electricity, signal box all lit by paraffin lamps.)

In hindsight, Lowerfield was always cold. No central heating, a three bar fire in the lounge which was very rarely switched from one to two bars. In the late 1960's night storage heaters were installed in the main rooms downstairs which took some of the edge off the cold. Eventually I moved into a bedroom that was over the then kitchen that overlooked the kitchen garden. I was ok, there was an Aga in the kitchen – but I still remember ice forming on the inside of the bedroom windows on winter mornings.



Sundays for many in the country would consist of roast lunch followed by a drive in the country, a scone tea with lashings of jam

& clotted cream. Then back for The London Palladium show on the TV. The first picture above from about 1969 shows Dudley Densham, his mother Kathleen Densham, wife Isabel Densham and son Geoff Densham on one of the drives in the country (probably Dartmoor). We are standing in front of an S type Jaguar of which few survive as they rusted quickly.

The second picture is of gardeners Eddie Bibbings and Snoshow (presumably a nickname but I knew no other). Great stalwarts for keeping Lowerfield kitchen garden going and lovely people. I think Eddie had previously worked for grandfather Richard Densham at Lapford Wood and lived in the cottage near the original Lapford Wood entrance on the main A377 road.

The fishing. During the fishing season many afternoons were spent with Dudley and Martin on the salmon/trout fishing beats at Chenson. I was rubbish at fishing but there was a very pleasant walk beside the river. The Chenson rail crossing had a serious accident in the 1960's when my cousin Robert Knapman was moving a JCB type earthmover across the rail crossing when it was struck by a train. Robert Knapman received serious head injuries and was not expected to live. However the amazing neurosurgeons at Plymouth Hospital put him back together and he had a good life for another 50 years (less some issues – like no taste buds!).

I also remember Chenson because one afternoon my grandparents old Austin A40 Somerset used by Dudley Densham for fishing transport had a flat tyre. Putting the jack in and winding upwards went through the rusted metalwork like a cheese wire!

# The Great Wall.



The top of the kitchen garden against the road up into the village had a cob wall. A crack developed at the top end of the wall due to

subsidence and the decision was taken to demolish. This entailed the closure of the road. So a tractor with 2 big anchoring forks was located in the field across the road. A hawser went from the tractor to around the wall. The hawser was tightened and the wall came down in a cloud of dust. The rubble was cleared away for the road to re-open. The video of this was accompanied by Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture with crashing cannon.



Over many years Dudley Densham built stone walls and a summerhouse on the front lawn. He had amazing energy. Taking out tons of chicken poo in the early morning, repairing TV's during the morning – or working in the kitchen garden. For relaxation in the afternoon he would build the stone walls by the front lawn.

The tree to the east of the main lawn made an unforgettable impact on me. When I was sleeping in one of the front bedrooms the tree was full of rooks. Early every morning they would wake me with their cacophony! Moving to a room overlooking the kitchen garden was a vast improvement.

North Tawton. North Tawton was always fun to visit. Cousin Maurice Densham had a small railway system in their orchard garden behind Melhuishes. I only rode in it once before the system was broken up and sold and a new house Orchard Close built for their retirement. The remainder of the orchard was developed for housing. The railway was opened for rides for the townspeople on most summer bank holidays.



The images above are from that system. Many of the engines continue to exist at other private railways. For more information see: <http://www.steamtrain.co.uk/locomotives>

Tamar Queen also appears to be known as Western Queen.



The first picture above was a family touring holiday in France in about 1959. My French was non-existent but fortunately we had a Channel Island driver to take us around and show off the Brittany sites. The second shows Lowerfield after significant repairs and painting about 1961.



The first picture above shows the house after the extension was built and garden walls completed so early 1970's. The second picture shows the 'Shop'. In the 1960's Dudley Densham ran a TV sales and repair business from the rooms at the left hand end of the first picture. He always had a major interest in electronic technology (self-taught) and was always the first to get the latest TV or audio gadget. Eventually the business was sold in about 1975 and the 'Shop' was converted to a billiard room with a full size billiard table (ex Lapford Wood). Unfortunately the room wasn't quite large enough so the walls were back dug & supported to provide cueing distance (and a short cue was also available).



Like most farms we had an old tractor which was probably a Ferguson TED20 from 1950. This did sterling work on the 20 acre smallholding. The only problem was that it wouldn't start in winter as it had 6volt electrics. Elder brother Martin Densham cleverly converted the electrics to 12volt operation and after that it was perfect. In the farm sale of contents after which Dudley & Isabel moved to Crediton the tractor sold for just £20.



The bottom end of the kitchen garden was converted to more grass & orchard as time went on but the remainder was managed for fresh produce by Dudley up to the age of 70 in 1977 ably assisted by gardener Eddie Bibbings The poultry business had gone about 1972 though the buildings remained.

The traditional family meal was New Years Eve where two local geese would be roasted. I never quite understood why so much fat came out of the goose but it was superb for roast potatoes and parsnips. Christmas pudding with plenty of clotted cream followed.



The fields were latterly tilled to barley so harvest time was great. I remember the above moment as the contractor's harvester would backfire. When a large diesel backfires everyone knows about it. After several losses of power a mechanic was called and the engine was rebuilt in the field - overnight.

Dudley & Isabel left Lowerfield in c.1977.