

Recollections of Mrs Winifred Hope (nee Paget)

Paget family : owned Ibstock Place from 1925 to 1945

Mrs Hope grew up at Ibstock Place House and has given our archivist a full account of her life during these years.

1925 :Purchase of the house, then called St.Serf's House.

Her father Major John Byng Paget bought the house while his French wife and their young family were living in France. The house was to be a surprise for them when they arrived from France to be reunited with him. Mrs Hope remembers arriving with her mother at the new house - full of excitement. They drove up in through the lodge gate which was the main entrance, and up the tree-lined drive to the front porch. The house then had a very rural setting with a farm between the house and Richmond Park.

Ibstock Place: Major Paget decided to change the name of the house from St.Serf's House to Ibstock Place. This was after the village of Ibstock in Leicestershire from where the family originated, as documented in Burkes Peerage. The house had 16 bedrooms and four reception rooms and was luxuriously furnished with antiques including a Louis XVI suite de salon in Aubusson tapestry, a panel of Brussels tapestry and two grand pianos.

Swimming Pool: The family enjoyed the enormous garden. Major Paget decided to build a swimming pool in the grounds, and this is thought to be one of the first private swimming pools in Britain. Without the benefit of modern chlorine, the pool was green and full of tadpoles and frogs. For this reason, the pool was drained and refilled regularly. Mrs. Hope recalled swimming in a woollen bathing suit with her sister, who is seen by the pool in the photograph from Mrs Hope's album.

New Baby: Mrs Paget gave birth to their son John in the house (in what is now the Registrar's room opposite the 5th year common room).

Staff: The house was run with the help of a staff of about 13 people. These included a night watchman (who lived locally), housekeeper, butler, maids and manservants, and gardeners. The servants' wing is now occupied by Maintenance Staff. Also in this wing was a room containing the 'telephone exchange' from where incoming calls to the house were answered and connected to the correct person.

Features: Major Paget was very interested in 'modern gadgets' and installed a sun-bed in a room off Mrs Paget's bedroom (now the staff room).

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Entertaining: The Paget's loved to entertain, and held an annual summer garden party to which they invited many guests from the world of musical theatre and dancing shows. Major Paget would read palms and could prophesy the future of people. Winifred recalls him reading the palm of a house guest, Mrs Wallis Simpson, and prophesying that she would be 'queen of England in all but name'. This was some time before Mrs Simpson began her famous liason with Edward VIII which led to his abdication and exile to France.

Education: The boys were sent to boarding school, and the girls attended the convent school in Roehampton Lane. The girls were encouraged by their father to play tennis with the students at the Froebel College across the road. This caused Winifred great embarrassment as the students were a lot older than she was.

Presentation at Court: Aged 18 years old, Winifred was presented to Queen Mary after her debutante year in which she attended balls and dances given by other debutantes, and held her own ball at Ibstock Place.

Weddings: Winifred held her wedding reception at Ibstock Place in 1938. The event was photographed for the national newspapers. After her marriage, Winifred moved to Little Tew, in Oxfordshire. After the war broke out, her father moved out of Ibstock Place and joined her in Little Tew.

World War 2: The house was requisitioned by the Ministry of Works in October 1942. The Pagets decided to put the house up for sale and to auction all the furniture. The furniture auction held in October 1942 raised the sum of £4,800 as reported in the Wandsworth Borough News. However, the sale of the house was unsuccessful. Major Paget was paid £750 per annum rent by the Ministry of Works from May 1943 for the use of the house by the air ministry who carried out the top secret Operation Crossbow.

Sale of the house: In June 1945 Major Paget agreed to sell the house to the Froebel Institute.