

# FROM THE FISHING LODGE

Here at the centre of the Expanding Universe, the Fishing Lodge has been undergoing something of a rebirth, with a cleaning off of layers of its galactic dust, and the front door now shining out like a super nova! The windows and door were so rotten, and so devoid of any sign of paint, that the time had come for some action.

With the arrival of the dreaded painters and decorators came the continuous hammering and sawing, to say nothing of the burning off of layers of old paint and the smell of filler and primer. And to add further to the turbulence there was dust and wood shavings blowing everywhere – and all with the windows and door open for a whole week! It was frankly enough to drive one to drink (coffee mainly – painters drink prodigious amounts)

Now I have this smart, shiny new front door, how I wish Lady H was still living in the flat behind the Lodge. It was she who, many years ago said, ‘Mr Foster, I do so hope you will soon do something about your front door, it does offend the eye so’.

Well Lady H., I have never forgotten the offence my door gave you – I only hope that from your new elevated vantage point you approve of the change.

I am sure you are all well aware that after a repaint of such an old building as this, there is a considerable amount of tidying up to be done, and as I have been trained as a fully qualified vacuum cleaner operator, it falls to me to apply my skills. As a result of which, there is one strong piece of advice that I feel I must pass on to any aspiring new v.c. operator. NEVER get the nozzle of your machine any where near the toilet roll! Unfortunately the toilet arrangements in the Fishing Lodge are rather cramped to say the least, and it is therefore with difficulty that one is able to fit oneself and the machine in the confined space at the same time. The rest, as they say, is history. The nozzle came perilously close to the toilet roll; there was a shriek; a throaty gobble, and a shudder from the machine, and the toilet roll began to spin at 2000rpm. It took about five seconds for the whole roll to disappear up the pipe. This meant that not only does one lose a perfectly good toilet roll, but it renders the machine useless until one replaces the bag, since it is now full of toilet paper! Lessons must be learned, as they say in government circles.

Perhaps Fate was playing its tricks that afternoon, because the telephone rang and the caller (whose name was Abdul) was pleased to inform me that I had been selected to have my house decorated for Free, and that it would be open as a Show House for a month, and he would like to come and discuss it at my convenience. I told him that we could not both get in there at the same time!

Often in the past the Lodge has been the listening post to all sorts of spicy bits of gossip. Never more so than when it was usual for residents to socialise on the various seats that were (and still are) dotted around the green areas. One of the favourite of these was the seat on the south of the Lodge, up against the fence. This provided the sitters with a nice warm

spot sheltered from the north breezes. It was also only a yard or two from my window – which in the summer was usually open. This was Lady H’s special seat, where on fine mornings she ‘coffee’d with her special friends.

One such particular warm morning the ladies were in earnest conversation, with their heads very close together, when a riveting snippet of conversation drifted in through the open window ... something about the man next door!

I happened to be cleaning my window at that moment, and it seemed prudent to slow down a little to see if I could catch the next bit.

I think perhaps I was overzealous in my attempt to catch more of the tale, and had not realised that the open window reflected my image onto Lady H’s glasses. Without so much as a falter in the flow of her conversation, she said, ‘Mr Foster, won’t you come and join us?’ Now here was clearly a dilemma of diplomatic proportions. Should I pretend not to have heard (in which case she would most likely repeat her invitation) and just carry on with my dusting – or should I throw embarrassment to the wind and say thank you very much? Which is what I did, after straightening my tie and doing my hair.

In those days when it was quite common for residents to take their tea and coffee outside, I was reminded that in 1914 when the Nation was talking of war, the cathedral green would be invaded by the exhausted and dusty bodies of our territorial soldiers resting from exercises on the Plain. The canons wives and other old ladies would flutter out, followed by their neat maidservants, all carrying trays of tea for the gasping men.

The river is still a magical place for me, as it has been all my life. As a boy, on warm nights through the summer, I would sit by my bedroom window, just listening to the sounds of the night. There would be long stretches of silence, and peering through the river mist you could imagine all kinds of weird shapes – slowly moving like giant dinosaurs. Presently there may be a ‘plop’ on the water, and after a moment or two there would be a shriek, or the snapping of a branch. All unconnected sounds, leaving a boy’s imagination to fill in the gaps between, mostly with mental pictures of menacing and evil animals, never before seen by man, and living underground in the daytime.

I can still remember, early in the mornings, before breakfast, dashing down the garden and over the bridge and into the meadow to see if I could find any tracks of these secret creatures. But I never did – can’t think why! Of course I don’t live at the Fishing Lodge, but if I did, and if I were to sit up all night on the river bank, I am sure it would still be a magic world to me – and I might yet find the strange tracks of some extinct and frightening animal. *When I do, I shall have the name ready – Plectathorus nadderii giganticus.* Just thought you should know!

Brian Foster