

## LATE SUMMER 2021 IN THE DAVID PARR HOUSE GARDEN

The garden seems to have settled into a quiet, late summer phase but there is an atmosphere of expectation because visitors are returning at last! As they step out of the back door they will see the elegant white Honorine Jobert anemones looking across primly at the bold and brassy scarlet geraniums. Those red geraniums in their tubs are standing in for Alfred's tomatoes which would have enjoyed the south facing white wall of the kitchen. Rounding the corner the sedums can be glimpsed, they will soon open to the bees and butterflies. As you pass further down the garden you may catch the roses Darcey Bussell (shadowy magenta) and Vanessa Bell (creamy yellow) putting out a second flush. The mauve-blue stars of the Michaelmas daisies are a reminder of David Parr's lovely painting over the mantelpiece in the kitchen. Showy red and purple flowers hang on the arching stems of Fuchsia 'David', a variety specially chosen for its name of course. Look out too for the shy, pink flowers of the delicate autumn cyclamen on the ground beneath the apple tree.



The apple tree. A magnificent and prolific specimen. Just spare a thought for the gardener weeding under it at this time of year. Weeding is a contemplative task I enjoy but the mindful mood is frequently shattered by the shock of apples thudding down around me. Tin helmet anyone? The thrill of apple barrage and the prospect of the house opening has created a sense of urgency. Trouble is, urgency doesn't seem to work for me any more, it just creates muddle and aggravation.

You know those awful dreams where you simply can't get it together? I was 'urgently' replanting a tulip bulb (unearthed by those wretched squirrels, no doubt) and needed the fork from the shed. So I put in a trowel to mark the space for the bulb while I went to the shed to fetch the fork. There, I saw some netting which was needed for another job, so I fetched the netting but forgot the fork. OK, I thought, huffing and tutting, I'll do the netting job but I need string. So back I went to the shed to fetch the string and yes! I remembered the fork too. Well done. Unfortunately, I found that the piece of netting was not the right size and I needed the scissors. No. I'm *not* going back to the shed again. I'd got the fork so I would return to the original job of replanting the bulb. I'd simply go back to where I'd put the trowel. Ah, but hang on. I searched fruitlessly about the garden and finally threw the fork down in a useless rage. Yup, I expect you are ahead of me. I just couldn't find where I'd put the trowel...

While working in the garden, I sometimes find poignant reminders of the past: a button, a chip of china or a stem of clay pipe. One time, I turned up a fivestone from an old game and it made me think about Elsie and Alfred's daughters, Ann and Rosemary. Then I reflected that there was another, earlier generation, who also grew up in this house and garden: David Parr and Mary Jane's children. They had two

daughters: Mary Emma (Elsie's mother) and Nellie (who emigrated to Canada) and a son David Douglas.

David Douglas Parr (1886-1975) must have been an important figure in Elsie's life. When her grandfather died, Elsie was sent to live here with her widowed grandmother. David Douglas was a frequent visitor, offering practical support to his mother and comfort to his niece, the homesick twelve-year-old Elsie. It was her Uncle David who made Elsie the delightful dolls' house that visitors can see upstairs. He was regarded with great affection by Elsie's daughters too, who recall how fond he was of his cat and how Elsie, in turn, helped him out in his old age after the death of his wife Bertha.



There is a striking photograph of David Douglas as a child in the uniform of the Boys' Brigade. The Boys' Brigade is a youth organisation which combines military drill and fun activities with Christian values. It was founded in 1883 shortly before David Douglas' own birth. A Girls' Brigade came a decade later and both organisations are now multi-faith and worldwide. Photographs make it clear that the Brigade meant a great deal to the whole family through three generations. Not only was Elsie's Uncle David in the Brigade but Elsie's father, her brother, her nephew and his wife were all involved. It is very much in keeping with Elsie's own patriotism and faith.

David Douglas worked as a craftsman alongside his father and served in the Royal Engineers during the first world war. Perhaps he was a gardener too as there is a photo of him looking up with a cheery grin from his digging in the garden here. In another picture, we see him by the back gate with his bicycle and what looks like sunflowers and hollyhocks behind him. Sunflowers and hollyhocks still grow against the fence. I like to imagine the child David Douglas calling them to attention as he marches up and down the path in his Boys' Brigade uniform practicing the drill — sure and steadfast.

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