

When my father Walter Kingsbury, born in 1908, was at school in England a friend of his was Francis Cook (who later became my godfather). His father Herbert Cook owned, among other things, the property of Monserrate and adjacent quintas in Sintra. Monserrate had been acquired and rebuilt by Francis's great grandfather in 1856.

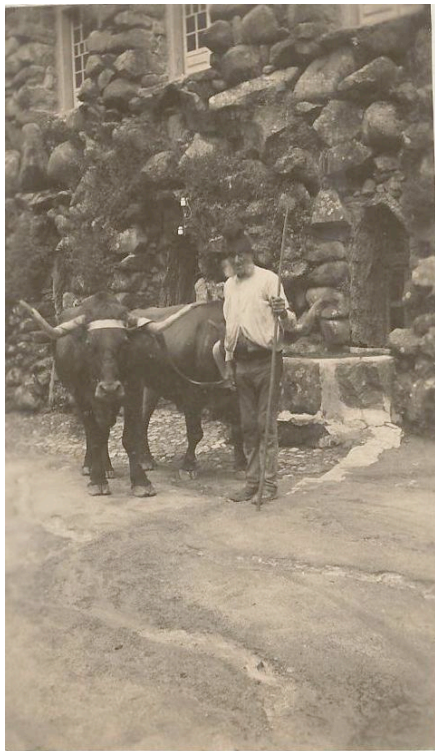
In or around 1937 Francis Cook needed a new administrator for Monserrate to succeed a Mr. Oram who was relinquishing the post. He offered the job to my father who at the time was living by apple-farming in Ayemestry, a village in Herefordshire and, although he had stayed at Monserrate for a short period some years earlier before he was married, he had no knowledge or experience of estate management and did not speak Portuguese. However, the opportunity seemed appealing so my parents sold the apple farm and together with me, aged about four, my baby brother Hugh and a nanny, moved to Monserrate to take on the responsibility of administering the estate.

In principle the Cook family - Francis had seven consecutive wives and had earned the epithet of "Britain's most married baronet" - would stay at Monserrate for some weeks in the summer. One of the subsidiary Quintas - Quinta da Bela Vista - located off the Sintra-Monserrate road near Penha Verde (which also belonged to the Cooks) was allocated to us to live in when the Cooks were at Monserrate and all my parent's furniture and belongings from the house in Aymestry were shipped to Portugal and put in Bela Vista. However, as the war broke out soon after our arrival, the Cooks never came to Monserrate during the period of my father's administration and we did not stay at Bela Vista until after Monserrate was sold.



The botanical garden of Monserrate was open to the public and employed some twenty five gardeners and other personnel; the indoor staff numbered about six. The estate had its own electricity supply generated by an engine fuelled by paraffin which had a huge flywheel and a belt which drove a dynamo. I remember the smell of acid stored in the engine room in large glass bottles for use in batteries and was fascinated by how the long flopping belt remained on the drive-wheel of the dynamo which was flat and had no flanges to retain it.

Monserrate had its own team of oxen housed in the “boulder and cork” building near the stables. They were the responsibility of Domingos and Pedro, who sometimes slept in a bed in the corner near the oxen. I remember him sleeping there, next to the relaxing oxen in the exotic smell of cattle and bedding. The oxen were light brown in colour with enormous horns and were yoked to a creaking cart with two solid wheels which carried timber and firewood - and bedding for themselves - along the rain-rutted tracks of the Serra. The wooden axle and wheels made a loud groaning sound which, it was said, pleased the oxen and kept them in a good temper.

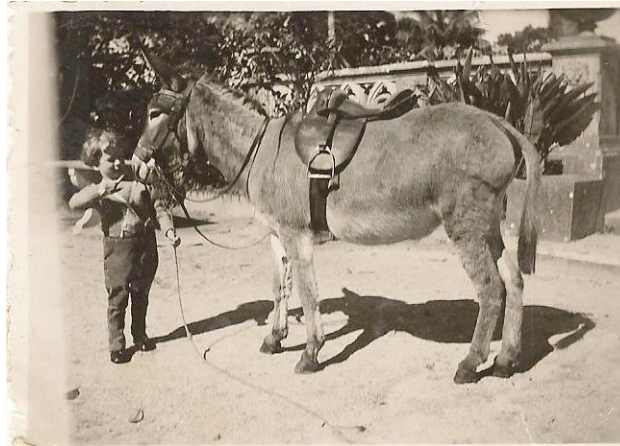


DOMINGOS AND HIS OXEN

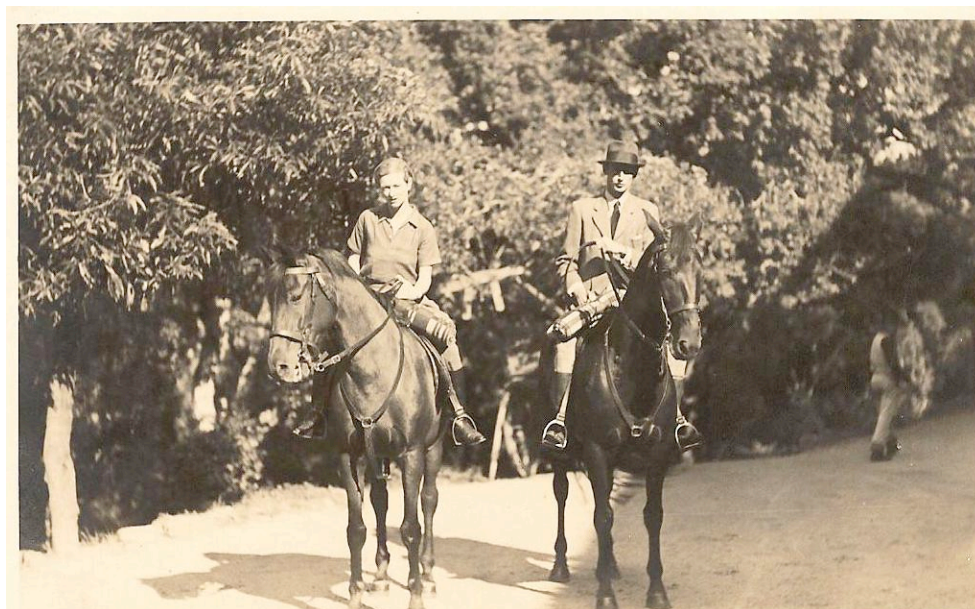


COLLECTING THE BEDDING

The stables housed a number of horses, mules and a donkey. There were two grey horses mainly used to take the cook, Carolina, to Sintra to do the shopping in a four wheeled carriage called the "Brake". There were riding horses used by my parents who sometimes rode over the Serra to Guincho and back. My father rode a black horse which reportedly had been trained for the bull-ring, but I do not know if this was true. A pony was acquired for me but it bucked and threw me off and I refused to ride it after that. However, I did ride a donkey called Rita who was much more docile.



MY DONKEY RITA



IDA AND WALTER WITH HORSES LARRY AND BLACK

Above the oxen's stable was the paint-shop with quantities of tins and bottles of all kinds. The head painter was Garibaldi Martins who also painted landscapes and other subjects including views of Monserrate, one of which I have today. Next door was the carpentry work-shop where a number of fulltime carpenters worked repairing and making doors, windows, fittings, furniture and so on for the many buildings of the estate.

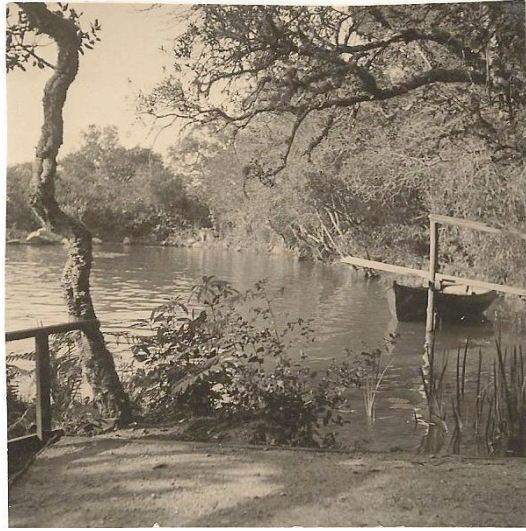
The gardens were maintained by a large number of gardeners, of course completely un-mechanized. Particularly around the house the watering was done with large green watering cans filled from basins fed through the irrigation system ultimately supplied from

the lake on the other side of the road opposite the main gate. The head gardener was called Cipriano and he lived in the house just inside the first entrance gate to Monserrate on the road from Sintra. There were quite extensive green houses but I do not know to what extent plants were propagated, replaced and renewed during this period.

At the bottom of the rise to the front entrance of the Palace there was stretched a chain with a wooden disc in the middle which separated the gardens, open to the public, from our private area. When we drove up in the "Old Morris" – an extremely upright car that my father had had in England and which was shipped to Portugal – there nearly always seemed to be some gardener or member of the staff who would run forward and unhook the chain for us to pass.

There were two main gates to Monserrate; the top one on the main road manned by Jose do Portao – an elderly man who I think had spent a lifetime in this job. He was the father of Antonio Faria and Julia. Antonio was a mestre d'obras and developer who lived in a large house in Galamares. He organised the building of our house, the Quinta da Fonte dos Cedros, near Penha Verde, in about 1954. Julia was one of our servants at Monserrate and Bela Vista for many years. The lower gate with lodge leading to Galamares was manned by Jose Adao (Maneta) who had lost a hand in a blasting accident in a quarry. Many of the employees at Monserrate came from Galamares and also to some extent from Eguaria.

The interior of the Palace was of course exotic and extraordinary although, being a small child I took it all rather for granted. We used as our living room the library which as was lined, floor to ceiling, by leather-bound books seemingly of great age. Some rooms we used little, in particular the so called drawing-room which contained many Chinese vases and porcelain horses. If one looked inside these objects there always seemed to be cigarette ends at the bottom. I spent much of my time riding a pedal car, and sometimes a small tricycle, from one end of the house, round the fountain in middle, to the other end and back again. We also used to toboggan down the big lawn by the side of the house on tea trays when the grass was dry in summer. We used the lake a great deal in summer. We would take a picnic of sandwiches and tea in thermoses and spend the afternoon rowing in the green wooden boat, swimming and sliding down a "water-chute" that had been made by the carpenters. My father had a shallow area fenced off with a wooden barrier for small children to play in.



LAKE AT MONSERRATE

In 1940 there was a feeling, at least in British diplomatic circles, that Germany might occupy Portugal to ensure wolfram supplies and for other reasons, so my mother, our nanny, my brother Hugh and myself went to Canada where we remained, in Montreal, for two years.

During our absence my father remained and worked in counterespionage in the British embassy. The Palace was used to provide hospitality and as a venue for intrigue to support the allied war effort. It was visited and frequented by journalists and personalities from Britain and other allied countries.



BALLET AND GARDEN PARTY GIVEN BY PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT IN HONOUR OF SPECIAL BRAZILIAN ENVOY SUMMER 1941

It is reported that on one occasion a dinner party was given, attended by an agent who travelled specially from England for the purpose of being seated next to a Portuguese lady (a certain Mrs Espirito Santo) who was known to have pro-German sympathies, in order to feed her false information which, it was believed, would be conveyed to the Germans in Lisbon.

There was a plan to organize a large-scale social event at Monserrate in order to raise money "to buy a Spitfire". However, it had to be cancelled because the Portuguese government considered that such an event was not in accord with the country's neutral status.

When the scare about a possible German invasion of Portugal abated and the tide of war changed we returned from Canada via New York on the ship "Carvalho Araujo", deemed safe from attack because of Portugal's neutrality.

The staff assembled in the front porch to welcome us back and life continued as prior to our departure. I was sent to school in England in 1943; KLM ran a service from Croydon in England to Portugal and I made my first flight in a DC3 Dakota from an earthen strip at Granja do Marques near Sintra, which passed at the time for "Lisbon Airport".



STAFF OF MONSERRATE WELCOMING US BACK FROM CANADA

The economics of post war Britain made it impossible for Francis Cook to keep Monserrate running; the property produced no significant income at all and outgoings on staff, gardeners, maintenance and so on were colossal. Some subsidiary quintas were sold, including Penha Verde, and eventually a buyer was found for Monserrate and adjacent land – including the Capuchos convent. Unfortunately all the furniture and other contents were sold before the empty and abandoned Palace was eventually purchased by the state.