

## Robin Mills met Sylvia Creed Castle at Crabbs Bluntshay Farm, Bridport



© Sylvia Creed Castle Photograph by Robin Mills

I was born just down the road from here at Peace Living Farm, a farm of 8 acres, where my mother kept 4 cows, and some hens and geese. My parents rented the farm; when the tenancy came up it finally prompted my father to marry my mother. He'd been courting her for 5 years, and the engagement had been another 5 years. He was a cautious man.

Such a small farm didn't make them a living of course, but there was a little income from the cows and the eggs to add to what my father earned working on this farm, Crabbs Bluntshay, which has been in my family since 1914. The origin of the farm's name comes from the local medieval manor; the "haeg", a hundred (a land area measurement) belonging to a man with blond hair called "Blundel". Later somebody called Crabb must have bought it. It would be interesting to know if it was associated with a nunnery or an abbey in the area, but so far I don't know. And the further you go back in historical research the more time consuming it becomes.

My great grandfather was forward thinking. He had 8 sons, 7 of whom wanted to farm, so he managed to either find them tenanted farms or bought them a farm to give them a good start. This farm was one of those he bought, a result of the big estates being split up. The printing firm, Creeds, was run by John Creed, who recently died; he was my father's first cousin.

# Sylvia Creed Castle

When the Marshwood Vale Young Farmers Club was founded and held their meetings in Broadoak Hall, as a teenager I was very involved in the new club, which had evolved from Whitchurch YFC. I much enjoyed helping organise events and the social life it provided and missed it dreadfully when I left the area to work elsewhere.

I worked in Bridport for a couple of years, cycling up and down the hills to work, but then had to decide either to work in a bank, or join the RAF. I decided on the bank and got a job in Swanage. And then, a friend from near here and I began to talk about Australia. Many of my contemporaries were getting engaged and married, which, in my teens, definitely wasn't my plan, and I saw Australia as a ticket to freedom. I think many local people, and my father was one, didn't understand why I, a farmer's daughter my age didn't want to marry a farmer and start a family immediately. They thought I was a bit strange, and possibly still do. My friend and I applied in April as £10 poms, and by June we were gone.

I found a job in the Australia and New Zealand Bank, for a year, living in various flats in Sydney with people I'd met. After a small farm in West Dorset, I loved the experience of my new life. My Dorset accent was a source of curiosity; I was often thought to be either Irish or American. Interesting, because there are words which are common to both old Dorset and the other languages. My parents, and folk of their generation, were a rich source of West Dorset words and dialect which has mostly been lost.

After Sydney I went to Queensland to look after children on a remote sheep station—as cook and nanny with experience of neither—then to Tasmania picking apples, and another bank job in Melbourne. I then got a letter from my mother with the terrible news that my sister only had a few months to live, so I dropped everything and came home.

I stayed on in Dorset after her death for about a year, working in Axminster, and then taking a secretarial course in Weymouth, followed by a stint of temp work in London, but always felt I hadn't finished with travelling. The next adventure involved a coach trip with 39 other people through Europe, Asia, and across the north of India to Nepal. It wasn't part of the plan, but it was the time of the India/Pakistan war, in which millions of people died. By the time we reached Nepal all the borders were closed, so we were stuck. With hindsight I should have stayed there; I could have



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taught English, the people were lovely, and it was cheap living. But I was on a mission to get to Australia, so as soon as the borders reopened, off I flew and completed my journey, back to Australia, and stayed “down under” for 2 ½ years. After which I travelled through the far east, Japan, Hawaii, the west coast of the USA, and Canada, and returned to the farm in Dorset.

I then went to London to train as a teacher, and taught primary education at multicultural schools in London, for 10 years. My last academic project at college was a geographical study of the parish of Whitchurch Canonicorum. With encouragement from local author and publisher Rodney Legg several years later, I turned the work into an historical account of the parish, and surrounding Marshwood Vale parishes, from 1880 to about 1985, and published it as a book called *Dorset's Western Vale*. And through Little Toller Books I've just republished it. It includes a lot about agriculture during the period; I've included photographs which my mother took in her teens, everyday farm scenes which are of great rarity now, and which make me regret the photographs I didn't take myself. And I have described the local crafts and trades which made most parishes self-sufficient, the history of St Candida and Holy Cross Church, Whitchurch School, notable buildings of the area, and some notable people. During all the research and interviews with many local people I became fascinated with the history of the people of my community, and I remain so; some people consider me the local historian for the Marshwood Vale, but I really don't know everything.

I taught at Colfox School when I finally came back to Dorset after my father died. Finishing my book and publishing it helped

me readjust to life in West Dorset, but the countryside in those days was changing rapidly, in ways I found hard to accept. Hedgerows were being grubbed up, and the verges of the narrow lanes were being destroyed by ever larger tractor traffic, all part of the advances in agricultural technology and government grants to increase production that had been happening since the '60s. I was sending articles to the Bridport News about it, in particular observations about the road I took to work at Colfox School. The articles were unsigned, but most people knew who'd written them; as a farmer's daughter I did get some strange looks as a result.

Since I've settled back in Dorset I've become very involved in local voluntary work. I've been on the Parish Council since 2001, latterly as organiser of the local amenities working party; I belong to the PCC, I'm treasurer of the local Family History Group since 1999, and treasurer of the Bridport History Society. (I've always loved figures!). I'm also the Char Valley Parish Council's Liaison Officer for Ancient Monuments. Under this title I have put on three exhibitions in 2009, 2010 and 2018 at the Whitchurch Village Hall. I also write historical pieces in the Parish Council's newsletter, and occasionally in the local church magazine, and hope my contributions are interesting to locals and newcomers alike.

Crabbs Bluntshay Farm is 65 acres, not big enough to make a living. My niece and her family rent half of it and do the tractor work for me, including mowing the grass in the campsite and making silage for my suckler cows' winter feed. I rear geese for the Christmas market and sell flowers. I run the campsite myself, although I do employ cleaners sometimes. There has been a farm campsite here for many years, in fact since my parents were operating a very basic site; it now has facilities for a number of touring caravans and camper vans, and an unlimited number of tents. I've got hard standings and electric hook-ups, and shower and toilet blocks. I love having all the campers around, some of whom come back year after year, and they love holidaying on a working farm in unspoilt West Dorset countryside. My website, Crabbs Bluntshay Farm Campsite, has been running since 2013 and I attempt to issue a newsletter once a month on aspects of the campsite, farm life, events in the Marshwood Vale, historical articles, musical interludes and anything else interesting which crops up.