

---

*Caterham*

The move to Caterham in 1950 was a public statement of permanence. For twenty years Fritz had been shifted around by the tides of history. In 1950 when he bought the house he was to live in until his death, he put down his anchor. The house was called Holcombe. It was cold, not particularly comfortable, but spacious with a four-acre garden set in beautiful green belt Surrey countryside. Fritz loved it. There was space for him to have his own study, there was more than enough space for a vegetable plot, there were outbuildings where he could set up a work bench. The children loved it. Even when Virginia was born in 1951, we were still able to have our own rooms, the garden was ideal for adventures and wild games, there was space for a succession of rabbits, guinea pigs, canaries, goldfish, chickens and a dog, all of which lived and died under our care. Muschi did not love it - except for the happiness it gave her husband and children. For her it was uncomfortable, cold, and hard work, particularly in the garden which she found a great burden. Most of all, Holcombe was too isolated for her. She found it hard enough to make friends with the reserved English, but even more so when she spent so much of her time scrubbing, washing and weeding. The interlude in Germany with its unreal living conditions for the members of the Allied Control Commissions had reminded her that life could be easier than it had been and now was again. Her hands grew red and in the winter became covered in painful chilblains. Their bedroom, painted a cold blue when they moved

in, chilled her from the moment she woke in the morning and yet she could not find the energy to redecorate it: it stayed that way for ten years.

Fritz on the other hand was filled with energy now that he was master of his own home again. He became a passionate gardener and for some years he spent his annual holidays making compost, sowing comfrey to feed a cow which never came, growing quantities of Swiss chard that none of the children liked eating, and also providing the family with other vegetables, soft fruit and salads. He took the garden very seriously and at once joined the Coal Board gardening club and the Soil Association. His eyes were opened to a whole new way of thinking. The Soil Association claimed that modern farming was going up a blind alley, was actually harmful to the long-term interests of the soil. Its philosophy was far broader than mere gardening. It was concerned with 'wholeness' and health in the broadest sense, believing that the base line from which to work begins in the soil itself. Their message was quite simple: look after the soil and your plants will look after themselves. Then, not only will you have healthy and nourishing plants, vegetables, fruits, salads and grains, but you will also have healthier animals and people. Fritz discovered that there had been small groups promoting these concepts since the early part of the century, who had broken away from the ideas dominating scientific thinking. Perhaps the earliest was Rudolf Steiner in the nineteenth century but following him came many others: Sir Robert McCarrison, Dr Francis Pottinger Jnr, and Dr Weston Price in the medical field; Sir Albert Howard, Dr William Albrecht and Dr E. Pfeiffer in agriculture; followed by a new group of men and women such as Dr George Scott-Williamson, Dr Lionel Bickton, Dr Dendy, Professor Barry Commoner, Rachel Carson and Lady Eve Balfour. Lady Eve Balfour was one of the pioneers of the Soil Association itself. She began organic farming in the early 1930s and in 1939 began experimental research on her farm to promote the ideals of organic husbandry. In 1947, the newly formed Soil Association took over her work. Fritz was so impressed by the Soil Association that he at once began to implement organic methods in his own back garden. He made enormous compost heaps, offending the neighbours by the cartloads of manure he



imported from a nearby pig farm to improve the quality of the chalky soil. He also tried to conduct experiments. Somehow he had acquired some wheat that had been found in the tombs of the pharaohs, grains thousands of years old grown in the once fertile Sahara desert. The ancient wheat grew but it was sterile. Fritz was astonished that after thousands of years there should still be life in the grain.

The garden became Fritz's passion. He got up at 6 a.m. to work outside before he went to the office, he worked at his compost when he returned from the office at seven in the evening; at weekends he would be found again in the garden slowly transforming it into a workable patch. The soil was not very good but he had confidence that it would be transformed within a few months so that the family would be self-sufficient in food in a year. The work made his elegant, beautifully manicured hands lose some of their softness. A new style of entertaining also developed at Holcombe. It could hardly have been a more striking contrast to the round of cocktail parties and dinners of the Control Commission days. Guests were most heartily welcome, but if they wanted to see Fritz they had to make sure they came in their gardening clothes. Two of the closest friends of the family at the time, Vera and Henry Morley, were counted on to keep the strawberry patch going. A thankless task as the harvest was usually gathered prematurely by the children.

Fritz's natural inclination to weld his ideas and actions into a unified whole made his gardening interests a complementary part of his work at the Coal Board as he explained to his parents, somewhat tongue in cheek:

Last week the Coal Board Gardening Club had invited an Expert from the Soil Association to show a film and give a talk on 'Organic Farming'. I was asked to take the chair, not as a garden expert but as a senior member of the Coal Board. In my introductory talk I said that in my opinion there were two primary factors in the economy - Food and Fuel - everything else was secondary. To listen to a lecture on food production in the Headquarters of fuel production was therefore the most significant concentration on the essential that I could imagine.

Slowly a new way of living evolved and Fritz was well pleased. He explained his new attitudes to his sister Edith in November 1951:

I have rarely felt better in my life. We are 'building' - our house, our garden, our friends - let alone the family. For this reason I have hardly any time for anything else, besides this 'circle' of mine. All my free time goes into the garden and into directing the children into productive activities. In many ways our house is an oasis in the desert of today's civilization. Of course we participate and make as much use as possible of the useful accoutrements, but we try not to let ourselves be pulled into all the useless hokus pokus. This at any rate is my great aim - to prevent the children becoming mere consumers without having a creative attitude to their lives. For that reason I have started all sorts of new things, for example, baking bread for the family. Once one has started it one wonders why one hasn't always done it. (The bread made from whole wheat, stone ground flour is of course infinitely more tasty and healthier than any bread from the baker.) Home produce from the garden has the same purpose: only in this way can the children of the modern world get some idea of what life and work really is.

But I express myself badly. I am the anti-intellectual intellectual. That means that the 'pure' intellectual is for me a horror of our time - much more fatal than the non-intellectual. I have had a week's holiday and have done so much manual labour that I can hardly hold my fountain pen any more. Actually I should have used my holiday to work out a new 'energy policy'. I have finished it in my head but I cannot get down to putting it on paper. It is terribly important but at the moment, compared to my compost, seems quite unimportant.

Fritz's creative interests were not confined to gardening and bread baking. He very much wanted the children to learn through creative work. Schooling until then had not been all that successful. After the Burgess Hill experiment the boys had had a succession of tutors who had generally given up the struggle to maintain discipline after a few weeks of chaos. Once



in Frankfurt, Christian had gone to boarding school and in England it was decided that he should continue to board in an English school, Westbury House, until eventually he decided to go to the independent boys' school, Caterham School, conveniently situated opposite Holcombe, where John also went. Fritz, however, wanted to foster more creative learning than school provided and with his father's and Uncle Fritz's education in America in mind bought the boys a small printing press for Christmas. He tried to inspire them with stories of their ancestors, how the original Schumacher Brothers had had their own business, printing little books for a variety of clients in New York. But although the boys enjoyed listening to stories of how their grandfather and great-uncle had clambered about the smouldering buildings of a German newspaper to salvage print for their own use, and how they had rewritten the poems of a client because they had not had enough 'e's in their supply of letters, they were never inspired beyond printing a few Christmas cards, letterheads and visiting cards. A business did not materialize. Fritz's efforts tended to have a similar fate. For a while he tried to mend the family's shoes, but found it too difficult to get supplies, and there still exists a box of broken watches and clock bits which Fritz had tried to mend without great success. But he undertook his practical activities with the greatest enthusiasm and encouraged the children to try all sorts of things from carpentry (for which John was provided with a proper carpenter's bench) to the sewing and weaving by which we made a motley collection of unfinished Christmas presents for our German relations for many years.

The pleasure Fritz derived from the new activities helped him to avoid getting 'eaten up' by his work at the Coal Board in the way his work had taken over in the past. Holcombe, the garden, and his new way of life removed the temptation to bring work home and the forty-minute train journey to London and back provided him with time to read. He wrote to his parents, 'I can only hope that I can now stay here for many years so that I can work in peace.'

His success in avoiding getting taken over by his Coal Board work speaks for his tremendous enjoyment of his home life for he began his work at the N.C.B. bubbling with enthusiasm. Not even the problems with Muschi had been able to cloud his

optimism. 'Things are starting well here at the N.C.B.,' he had written to Muschi on his first day. 'I am glad to be in this purely British outfit, where the first two chaps I was introduced to were Mr Gottlieb and Mr Picciotto . . . Everybody is frightfully nice to me, - expecting great things. I am telling them that I shall take a long time before I can say anything and that I don't know nothing.'

Of course, the coal industry as such was not new to him but he began his investigations at an even more basic level than the ins and outs of the workings of the British Board. His starting point was to look at all sources of power, both existing and potential, and put coal in a wider context. He lost no time. Within three days of joining the N.C.B. he attended a top-level meeting of experts, which included Charles Ellis, one of the members of the team who had split the atom. The implications of nuclear energy were discussed, and Fritz offered to summarize the issues afterwards; it was the best method of learning quickly. All the information he gleaned went straight into his notebook of basic facts - a method of information gathering and storage he had developed in the Control Commission. The next day he reported to Muschi, 'I am working through a lot of "basic" stuff on coal and all the other sources and forms of power, working out all the most important information relevant to Coal Board economics - things for most of which other people have to dig in files and reports or which they have to get someone else to work out for them.'

After a fortnight he knew enough to draft some chapters of the Annual Report. It was an ideal way to learn what had been going on and led Fritz quickly to the conclusion that not very much progress had been made since nationalization in 1946. There was a great deal for him to do and he realized that his success would depend on the use the members of the Board made of him. The 'big chiefs', whose servant and adviser he would be, made an instant impression: 'Every one of them could have been my father,' he wrote to Muschi.

There was one exception: E.H. Browne. Fritz was full of hope that this would be a fruitful relationship, reporting to Muschi: 'The most interesting man here seems to be the Director-General of Production, Mr E.H. Browne, aged thirty-nine. He has been described to me as a "genius". I met



him yesterday and was most intrigued. You will hear more about him during the next few years. If he is really a "genius" - you know I am going to fall in love with him. I wished he were.'

The other Board member who Fritz knew might be crucial to his work as Economic Adviser, was the Deputy Chairman, Sir Arthur Street. Unlike the Chairman, Lord Hyndley, Sir Arthur knew exactly how to use Fritz and what his value to the industry could be. He encouraged Fritz and listened to him so that Fritz felt confident that he would be able to achieve great things. This confidence was to be short-lived. On February 24th, 1951 Sir Arthur Street, aged only fifty-eight, died quite unexpectedly. It was a tremendous blow to Fritz who knew that he would feel the loss personally and professionally. He wrote to his parents the following day:

He was the most significant person that I have got to know in my professional life. It was he who sent me to Germany five years ago, and he appointed me to the Coal Board just over a year ago. I have worked in the closest co-operation with him for the last (almost) eleven months. He was the Coal Board, and the gap which he leaves behind is just unimaginably big. I have no reason to worry about my own position. But I will always miss Sir Arthur, I will always mourn him. He was goodness and wisdom personified, and his larger than life presence was at the centre of every constructive effort at the Coal Board and beyond.

The loss of Sir Arthur Street had a significant effect. He died before Fritz's role had been properly established, and Fritz was left without an ear on the Board. He found himself in a lonely and isolated position in which he produced ideas, made suggestions and made himself available for advice and consultation at all times, but felt continually that he was being seriously underutilized. The papers he put in front of the Board were often unsolicited, and the very nature of the job meant he was always in danger of treading on people's toes. As he asked questions about the industry, his rigorous investigations took him into many areas that were not strictly economic; technical processes, financial policy, personnel management, safety, in-

dustrial relations, every aspect came under his scrutiny. Not surprisingly, some specialists resented Fritz's questions and disputed his competence and right to enter their field, regardless of whether his suggestions had value. Fritz found hostility both at the pits and at the Board.

There was another blow in 1951. In the general election the Labour Government lost power. The attitude of the new Conservative Government towards nationalization was another element of uncertainty in the progress of the coal industry.

These factors did not deter Fritz from doing a tremendous amount of work for the Coal Board. He saw his function primarily as the one person in the industry who was paid to think. He was paid to sit back and take time to reflect on the industry as a whole and provide guidelines to the areas in which the specialists should direct their expertise.