

Bert Cox – gardener at Cushat Wood

Bert was a Leicestershire lad, born Robert William Cox in 1879 in Burton Overy. His parents were Robert Cox and Mary Ann Mattock. He was the oldest of 9 siblings - 7 boys and 2 girls. Three years before he was born, his paternal grandparents, along with much of the Cox family, emigrated to Utah in the USA. Bert's father and two of his brothers remained in Leicestershire.



Robert & Mary Cox with 6 of their 9 children. Bert, the oldest, is at the back

Bert started work as a gardener in 1894 on the nearby Ilstone Grange estate, working first for James Baillie and his wife Elizabeth and later for Frederick Murray-Baillie and his wife Alexandra. In the 1901 census Bert was an under-gardener and in the 1911 census he is recorded as being a gardener (domestic).

Burton Overy is a small village close to Ilstone Grange, an estate owned by the Baillie family. In 1904 Frederick's father James Baillie inherited the Cally Estate in Gatehouse, which in turn passed to Frederick in 1906. The Baillies changed their name to Murray-Baillie when they took over Cally (probably for inheritance reasons).

In 1902 Bert married Mary Elizabeth Smith (known as Polly) and a year later they had a son Robert James Cox, born in Burton Overy. In March 1912 they had a daughter Edith Mary.

Bert came to Gatehouse of Fleet in September 1913 to work as gardener for Mrs Murray Baillie of Cally. Cally House was rented out at the time so Col. Frederick Murray Baillie and his wife Alexandra divided their time between Ilstone Grange in Leicestershire and their house on the Cally estate - Cushat Wood, near the top of Ann Street.

When Bert and his family moved to Gatehouse they first lived in the West Lodge at the head of the Cally Avenue before later moving to the lodge at the top of Ann Street. Both these houses are close to the gardens of Cushat Wood.

The years during World War I must have been difficult for Bert, as 3 of his brothers John, Walter and George were killed. No war records have been found for Bert, so maybe he never enlisted. He would have been 35 when war broke out, so was perhaps considered to be too old and as a gardener may have been deemed to be of more value at home, helping with food production.



The grounds at Cushat Wood were derelict when Bert arrived, and he and Mrs Alexandra Murray Baillie designed and created a beautiful garden. It became well known and was on a list at Kew Gardens as a suitable place for young gardening apprentices to be sent for training. After Mrs Murray Baillie's death, Bert continued to work at Cushat Wood for her daughter Mrs Elizabeth Murray Usher, known locally as EMU. The gardens at Cushat Wood became a favourite place for garden parties, school sports days and other functions with people being keen to see the garden.

In 1959 Bert was recognized for his long service to gardening. He was presented with a certificate and a medal from the Royal Horticultural Society. The medal represented 50 years service but had an extra bar added for 60 years. Bert was too unwell to receive this award personally but it was collected for him by his last employer, EMU. He served the same family as a gardener for 64 years.

Bert was a well known character in Gatehouse. He would often accompany Col. Frederick Murray Baillie on shooting and wildfowling trips. He was a keen cricketer having played as a young man in Leicestershire. He helped EMU start the Gatehouse Cricket Club in the Cally grounds. In winter he enjoyed curling when the lochs were frozen, and was known for his singing at local concerts and dances.

He died in 1959, 6 years after his wife Polly. He was still living at the Cally Lodge in Ann Street, the house which is still known locally as Cox's Lodge.

