

TIME
AND PLACEEmilia
Fox

When I was little, I used to spend all the school holidays in Kimmeridge, a small village near the east Dorset coast. My parents [the actors Joanna David and Edward Fox] ended up buying a house there, and it remains in the family to this day. I went to school in London until I was 13, but I wasn't very happy, so I was sent to a nearby boarding school, Bryanston. As it was only 40 minutes away, I ended up spending ever more time in Kimmeridge.

Back then, it was a real holiday house where you could run in and out in wellington boots, and it didn't matter how dirty they were. Only when I was older did I become aware that it was a little bohemian. It had no curtains and no carpet, and the electricity sometimes worked – it had to be turned on in the shed in the garden, which was actually a falling-down stable block.

The water came from a well, so in summer, when it got very hot, there would sometimes be no water. You'd have to swim in the sea to wash or cool off. And when we could get water from the well, it was always brown, which made it all the more fun to me! As there was no mains water, I had to explain to friends who came to stay that you couldn't flush the loo or have a bath unless there had been heavy rainfall.

It was idyllic childhood innocence in every way – we spent all our time outdoors, making scrapbooks, pressing wild flowers, catching butterflies (which became a lifelong obsession for me) and going down to the seaside. There was no television, so it was really all about communication, taking our friends down there, using our imagination, reading and sitting in front of the fire.

As kids, we all piled into camp beds upstairs. My dad also had old apple trees, so, in the autumn, we'd pick them and the blackberries, then make delicious crumbles. Exploring that beautiful south coast was really special because it was



so untouched – much of the land is owned by the army, so it wasn't built on.

I still go back to

Kimmeridge now. There's no mobile reception, so it's a digital detox – within a few hours, you've completely forgotten how important you normally feel constant communications are. It's not easy for anyone to get hold of you, but that's what makes it such a haven. There are no distractions.

In the village, there's a wonderful cafe and shop, Clavell's – it's literally the only place in that neck of the woods to go. Farmers run it, along with their children, so there's always fresh produce. Otherwise, we'd go down to the fishermen's boats and ask for something freshly caught.

As idyllic as it sounds, however, there were downsides – particularly when we were younger. Winter living could be beset by problems. The car would regularly come off the track through the field that led to the house, so there'd be a big drama to get a farmer to come and pull you out. We'd end up leaving the cars at the end of the track and using a wheelbarrow to take the suitcases the rest of the way to the house. If you arrived at night after a 2½-hour drive, it wasn't much fun. My dad would never allow us to use anything like a quad bike to help out.

One of the loveliest things about going back to Kimmeridge now is that I can enjoy it again through the eyes of my four-year-old daughter, Rose. Last weekend, she told me it was her favourite place to be. I think that's because it's just so relaxed and we can all be together, with no distractions.

She thinks nearby Putlake Farm, an adventure farm for children, and Feather Down Farm are great. I love walking her along the beach, examining all the fossil fragments and checking out the sea life in the rock pools.

I'm just so thankful that so many generations of our family have been able to enjoy the house that time forgot in Kimmeridge – it really is my coastal haven.

Interview by
Sarah Ewing

Emilia Fox stars in
Silent Witness, on
Monday and Tuesday
at 9pm on BBC1

Cover photographs: Ian Dagnall; Colin Palmer/Alamy; Tony Howell/Getty

The actress Emilia Fox, 40, recalls idyllic summers on the Dorset coast



Our cottage in Kimmeridge took us back to basics – we fetched water from a well, picked berries and read books by the fire. I still go there for a digital detox