

# Memories of Cross Bank House, Kibworth *Part 1*

By Sheila Leslie-Miller

## Coming to 14 High Street, Kibworth in 1967

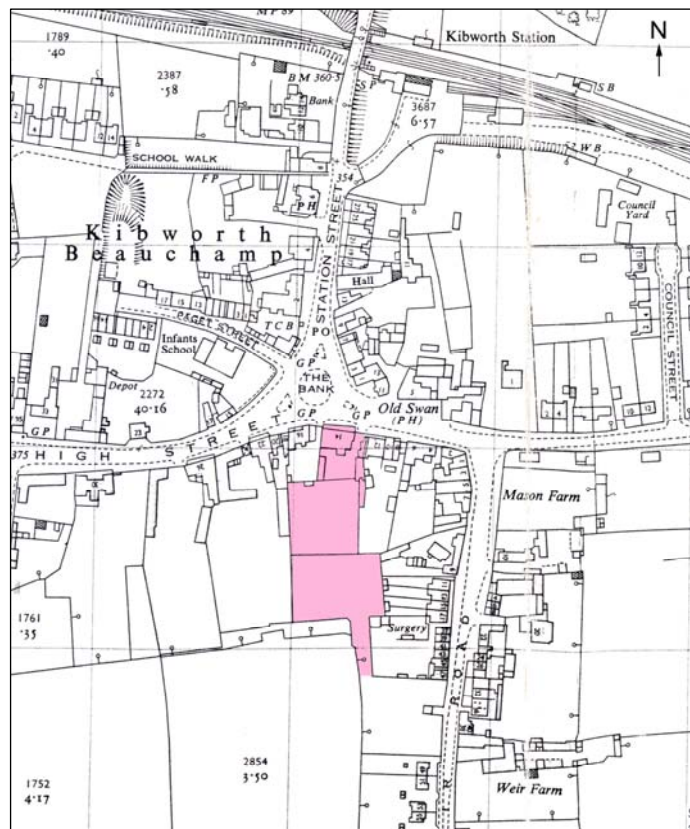
Under tragic circumstances I came to Kibworth in June 1966, my husband having been killed in a flying accident in the Royal Air Force. I had four young children aged from nine to a few days. My Mother sold her bungalow in Merton Way and we put together to buy No 14 High Street. We first looked at The Old Rectory, Cranoe - too isolated and a doubtful heavy roof; houses in Medbourne and Slawston; and then a telephone auction for Colin House in East Langton - we were outbid! And so, fortunately to No. 14. Dr Raymond F Simkin was retiring to Malta - his huge 17 roomed house for sale with almost an acre of 'jungle' - neglected, overgrown gardens - a challenge for Mother and I - "you are mad" we were told by friends. Sale price - £7750! We employed the services of a surveyor who advised us to go ahead.

We named the property 'Cross Bank House' after the historic 'Bank' at the front where markets were once held and is now often called 'The Square'. In his 1916 'History of Kibworth' F P Woodford records 'In 1848 the last "Statute Fair", locally called the "Statis", for the hiring of servants was held which took place on the Cross Bank, so called from a market cross which formerly stood there; where also the annual wrestling, known as "Kibworth Wrestling", was held ... A Market Cross stood on the highest part of the market place, where from the year 1221 the market granted by Henry III to Walter de Beauchamp had been held until its disappearance' (pages 27 & 80).

Dr John W Collington was the owner before Dr Simkin. Dr Collington had left a large wooden chest in the attics with his name across the top - we found it full of worm-ridden splints and trusses - rotten beyond redemption. Prior to him were Dr Edgar V Phillips and Dr Thomas Macaulay, other physicians. In 1894 No. 14 High Street was owned, along with much of Kibworth, Smeeton and Burton Overy property, by Robert B Haymes - the house was not sold with his estate in that year.



14 High Street, Kibworth in early 1900s



Location and extent of 14 High Street (in pink) Kibworth  
*Ordnance Survey map 1959*

I put the historic disentailment and sale deeds into the County Records Office; my personal conclusion is that the original house was built about 1780.



Aerial View of House and Garden of 14 High Street and surrounding properties on 10 June 1927  
Photograph taken by Aerofilms; reproduced with permission © English Heritage, NMR Aerofilms Collection

**Outside**

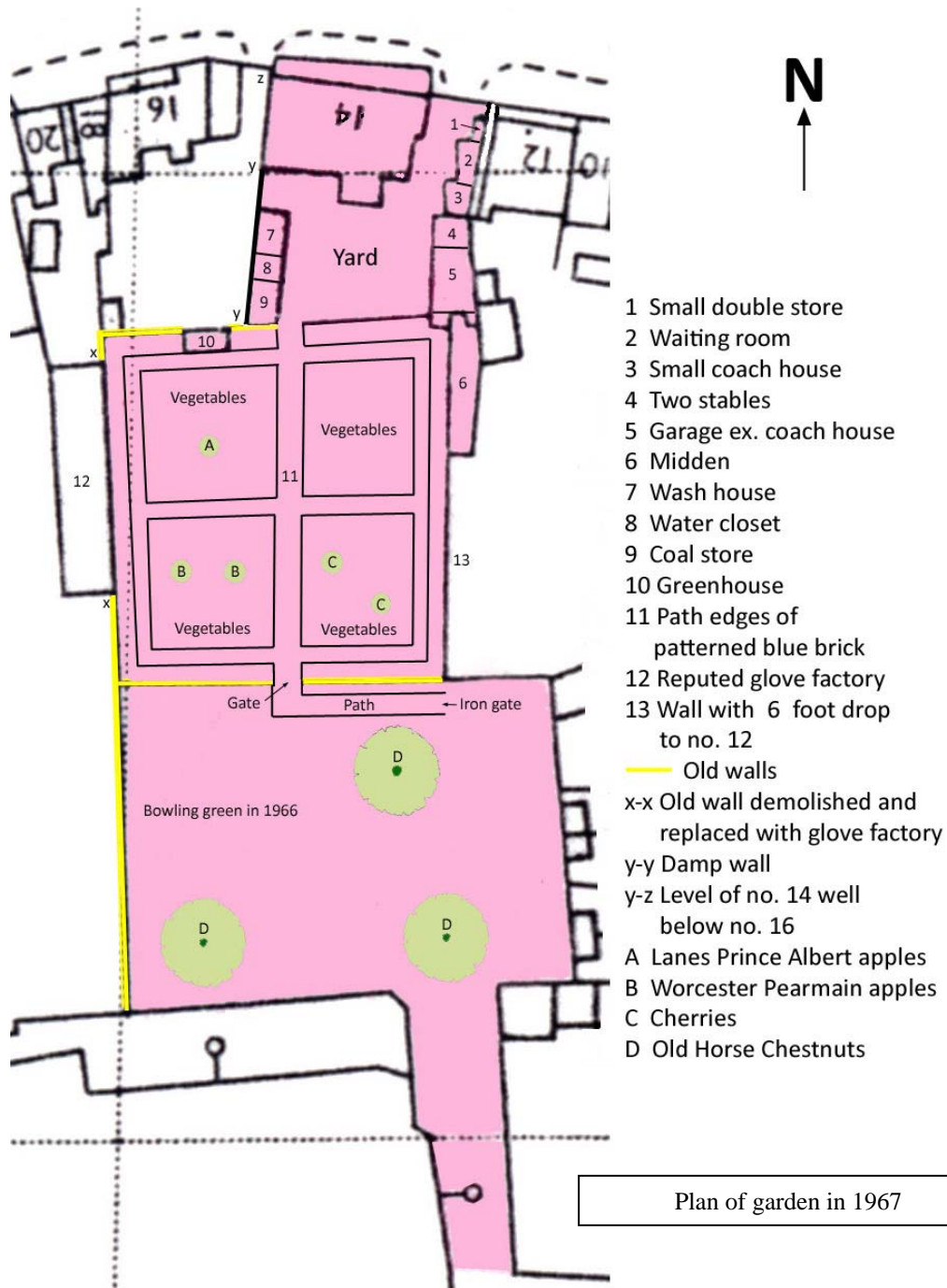
The gardens were in two huge mainly walled sections. The south boundary abutted a narrow strip of land belonging to Mr Ron Wright of No. 22. Beyond this Market Harborough Rural District Council was building Home Close flats and maisonettes for mixed tenancies - families, the elderly and singles were to co-exist in a new style community. I understand that today they are hard to let and are offered to over 30s.



Rear garden wilderness 1967

The furthest garden had been a bowling green and tennis lawn. It was overgrown and huge anthills covered with fine grass gave an awesome landscape. Rampant, scab-ridden espaliers, Cox's and Blenheim Orange leaned from the old walls - these spiked with hand forged nails which once held training wires.





Down the east side of the 'green' was an old iron gate leading into a wide strip of vegetable garden - the burial ground for dumped ampoules and phials - the doctors' waste which we naively never had tested! At the bottom of this strip was Mr and Mrs Frank Bolley's cottage, facing Barrack Yard once a site of six cottages inhabited by war veterans, it was an area of rubble later to be offered to us by Mr Dann, but we could not afford to buy it.

Three corners of this area hosted horse chestnuts - two in full maturity, one a leafy stump - a haven for wild life. Beneath these grew 'lords and ladies' or cuckoo pint. Nearby were holly and hazel and ox-eye daisies. For several years I cultivated the vegetable plot for the family but as I put in more time to teaching, councils and golf, Mr Fletcher (who lived in Weir Road) and Mr Bolley took it over for themselves.

The area between the yard and the bowling green was divided into four squares with paths between and around. There were wide borders round the perimeter and a derelict lean-to greenhouse with iron stove which became red hot when the wind blew and which went out at night! All was covered in weeds and overgrowth. The 'edgings' were huge cobblestones and blue edging bricks - a stack of which we left behind in 1983! A hand gate led to the bowling green.



Tractor and hard work transform the garden 1967

The south facing wall held an ancient apricot tree yielding big juicy, delicious, dark orange fruits. The east facing walls, once part of an old glove factory, held gnarled pears and damsons and many rusting iron nails. The 'factory' was Mr Wright's snooker room; the table came from the Fox family at The Knoll and is now at Kibworth Golf Club.

The north facing walls were covered in ivy and in the borders grew ferns, wood avens, jasmine, lilies and lanky Michaelmas daisies and golden rod.

The west facing wall retained the garden 6 feet above that of Mr and Mrs George Smith of No. 12. I was told there was once a rope factory near this wall - there were certainly old foundations in this corner. The top half of this wall had collapsed years before. It was a big drop!

In the north east corner of this kitchen garden was a big heavy wooden door into a midden containing several feet of broken medical bottles and phials. Bert Aggas did a spot of excavating but it was too deep and difficult - today such a dump would be illegal. The midden also had the 6 ft drop as did the adjoining two derelict sheds. One of these contained a big pile of dangerous quicklime. The midden area had a door into the large garage which may have been a stable or coach house originally. Some foundations of these buildings were of Northamptonshire stone. I was told that Dr Collington made his rounds in a pony and trap.



Garden improving 1967;  
greenhouse on the left and coal store on right

Near the midden door was an old potting shed in which hung a rotted sacking gardener's apron. The shelves held old hand thrown clay pots - almost a time warp!

In the eastern half of this garden area were two cherry trees - too difficult to protect from birds in the fruiting season. The western section had two prolific Worcester Pearmain and my favourite a Lanes Prince Albert - a wonderful cooker. One day it keeled over!

We called on the services of Mr Fred Muggleton, a friend of George Davis, with his tractor and scraper. Turf and planting soon transformed the wilderness. The light black loam was so easy to work unlike the heavy clays elsewhere in Kibworth.



Stables on the left, garage/coach house on right, 1967

I was filled with nostalgia in the stables. Gnawed or ‘cribbed’ partitions, mangers and hayracks, blue stable bricks for the floor with drains in the centre, and the musty smell reminded me of the ‘horsy’ days of my youth. The roof was of Swithland slates. We retained all this as found, and later kept a pony there.

Next to the stables was a small coach house with a brick floor and double doors - no window.

Next the infamous Waiting Room for non-private patients who had to cross the yard in all weathers to the Surgery. It had an old chimney and blocked up fireplace with wooden benches against the panelled walls. It could have been an old tack room. The floor was of damp perished brick - Kibworthians still speak of it!! An old Hincks-Bird glass ventilator cut into the window disappeared during the works. The door to the Surgery was via the Dispensary but there is an outline of a former door in the wall of the original house which could have been filled in when the Victorian extension was built.

Between this and the front wall were two tumbledown sheds containing rotten rustic garden furniture - they were demolished. It was a place for the dustbins.

The yard at back of the house was tarmac over old cobblestones. It was in a reasonable state but some cobbles were missing. Along the west side of the yard was a row of buildings. Nearest to the house the old wash house containing a ‘copper’ although of iron with a white wood much-used lid. There was a fireplace and drying racks still overhead. There was a cat arch in the door. The walls were seriously affected by rising and penetrating damp. It had a brick floor. We eventually used it for garden tools.



Stables and other outbuildings 1967; arrow points to former waiting room for doctor’s surgery



*Left: cleaned decorated head of poker from coal house*  
*Right: iron-head pick recovered from coal house*

Next to it was a lavatory with rusty overhead cistern which needed draining in winter - one had to 'pull the chain'. Nearest to the garden was the coal house where buried in two feet of coal dust or 'slack' I unearthed a lovely old steel and brass poker and an evil looking iron pick. Mr Bromley, the village coalman, would carry in one ton of shiny coal in rope bags on his shoulders from his lorry on the street. The coal had its familiar carboniferous smell and burned hotly in our new fireplace (made by Bells of Northampton).

*See Part 2 for my description of the house.*

Sheila A Leslie-Miller: Resident from 1967 - 1983  
Originally written in September 2003 (aged 70 years!)

Revised and photographs added in 2011

(with thanks to Norman Harrison of the Kibworth History Society for assistance in compiling the material)