

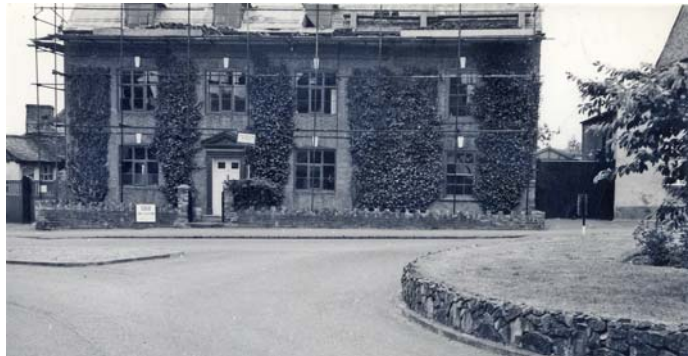
Memories of Cross Bank House, Kibworth *Part 2*

By Sheila Leslie-Miller

The House

The house needed a staggering amount of work doing to it after years of neglect - quite a venture and challenge for two women, one of whom was 64!!

We put all the building works in the hands of Messrs Taylor Davis - Percy, George, Jack and Geoff with carpenter Dennis Tebbutt. They helped us so much in taking on this enormous project.



Cross Bank House Restoration 1967



House Restoration 1967

The roof or 'umbrella' was in a dreadful state including the thick lead in the valleys which was badly pitted and was stripped and replaced. The front roof, as can be seen in the early 1900s picture (in part 1, page 1), was of Welsh slates as were all other areas except the rear main roof of graduated Swithlands - we changed them over for better appearance which Miss Willetts would not allow today under planning law! The under-roof was felted and the attic roofs lined with plaster board. Messrs Cumming and Haddon did a wonderful job as can be

seen today 36 years on! It was odd to have two types of slate on the original house. Many of the roof timbers which were pegged together had been used before. Their outer surfaces were infested with woodworm but the centres were fortunately sound. The timbers in the west 'extension' were newer. The floors were grey mortar with underlying reeds - quite a fire hazard! The attic dormers on the front were rotten and had to be replaced. The front guttering was corroded and renewed - the brackets hand forged by the blacksmith at Lubenham. The timbers and floors throughout were treated with Cuprinol to destroy woodworm and a small area of Death Watch Beetle in a lintel at the rear.

In the rear attic was an old free standing cast iron bath, with lions-paw feet on short legs, probably used by servants in the past; there was no plumbing at all in this room! The whole front attic had only one fireplace - how cold it must have been facing north in the winter with unlined roofs!

All chimney stacks on the main building were repointed. The tall pots were damaged and irreplaceable but we left one standing against a wall. They were replaced by shorter ones as seen today.

All ivy on the front of the house was removed - it was riddled with active woodworm and the underlying thick, dry dead wood was considered a fire hazard.

First Floor

At the front were three bedrooms and a landing with lovely architraves round the doors and oak-framed windows. We later uncovered an old wooden cornice hidden by plaster on the landing. The west 'extension' had sash windows some with hand made glass indicating its period. All the rooms had fireplaces. The rear room of the original house had no fireplace but space was taken up with a huge chimney breast from the kitchen. A door led out to the back landing and a staircase down to the kitchen. There was also a door from this room to the bathroom - cut through a main structural wall to the Victorian extension. The bathroom housed a huge copper geyser of African Queen proportions: it was sited at one end of the bath.



Attic door to back staircase

The small back landing led up to the attics and another old room which was knee deep in wood shavings - Dr Simkin's woodworking hobbies room. This room seemed like an old poorly-built former barn behind the west 'extension'. What a sight it was. Rainwater leaked into it and a cracked wooden beam needed metal-bar strapping - again an unlined roof. This room had a door into the front 'extension' bedroom, the biggest in the house. It had been unused for years, was very cold and had a rather 'bouncy' floor and black Victorian fireplace with a walk-in cupboard beside. It was a featureless square.



Attic room, formerly used for woodwork hobby

Ground Floor

The house stands on sand and gravel, pockets of which are found in Kibworth. There were sandpits off the 'jitty' by the chemist and in School Road once used for the railway and roads. The house stood fairly dry except where the odd High Street levels prevailed on the NW side of the house here 6ft below No. 16 damp-penetrated the walls. There must have been excavations during early building.

The scullery in the old 'barn' was primitive, only a geyser over the sink. We had the scullery stripped out as a kitchen but big yellow slugs still managed to make their way in winter - we never knew how!

Next to it at the rear and through a solid door rear entrance with huge box lock and key and down steps was the original kitchen - dark with one small window, penetrating damp and old beams painted red. A white-wood staircase led up through an old door to the first floor and attic - no windows and black walls!

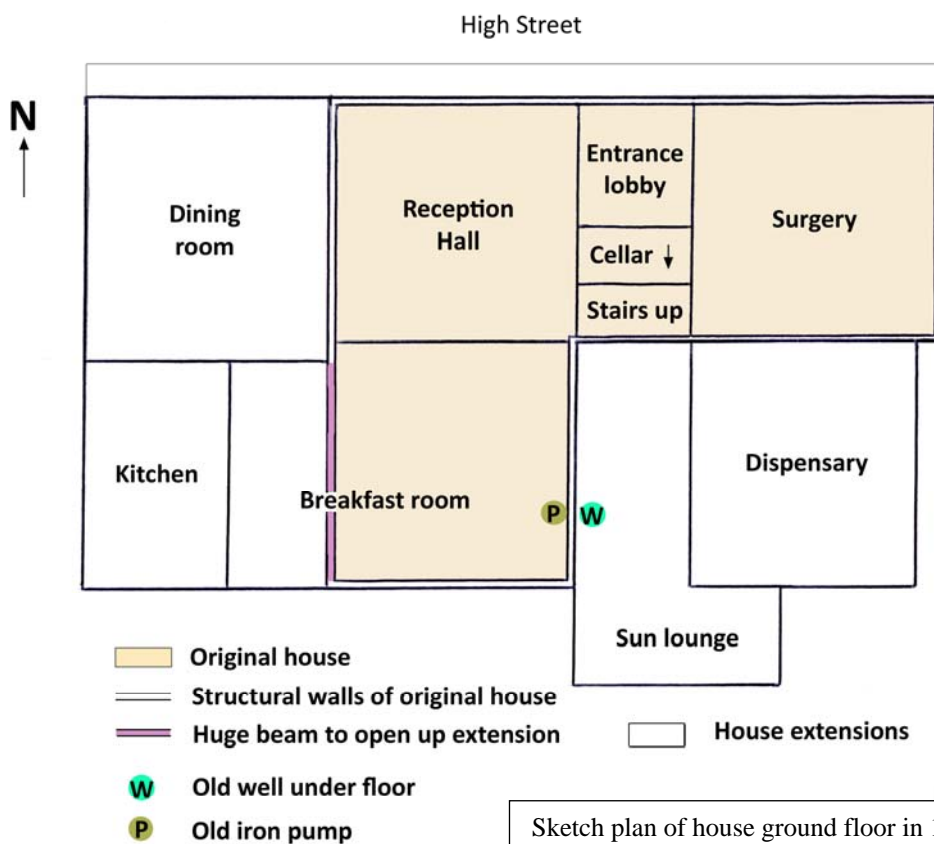
An old pine dresser with huge drawers was left behind fixed under a beam. An old range stood under an enormous chimney breast plastered with lime mortar containing animal hair.

This old kitchen became the 'Breakfast Room'. A new glass paned door to allow light in was fixed, a DPC and new floor, a 125btu boiler installed to



House Restoration Progressing 1967

serve all rooms except the attics and some dedicated scraping to remove red paint from the old beams all set things under way for modern living. The under-stairs cupboard remained damp - the outside earth well above floor level meant persistent penetrating damp. The cupboard door comprised two elm planks, said to be from a coffin maker!



This room to the yard became the focus of the household; it had a low door to the hall with an old black and brass lock and old beams, the one over the range of curved form. The ground floor 'extension' to the west had an alcove with cupboard and hatch to the Breakfast Room. I cannot remember the original fireplace but we removed the hall oak surround and blue-glaze tile feature and fitted it in as a replacement. This room was damp and cold again below the neighbouring level - it faced north. It became our dining room mainly used for special occasions.



Water treatment unit found in kitchen area

Next the original part, the 'hall', was once the main living room. It had a big inglenook with shelves under at either side of the fire. The fireplace was replaced with a stone face built by Jack Davis, in hindsight not such a good choice. There was an old dog grate with copper-ball ornaments. This went to auction at Warner Sheppard and Wade when we left. The inglenook surround was a lovely pine structure covered in treacle-brown varnish which we stripped back to its basic honey colour. The door to the entrance hall had lovely architrave. This hall had a red-brick floor. The heavy front door had old brass furniture - stolen during the works. I managed to find a replacement from a door of The Midland Hotel in Princess Road, Leicester, which I happened to pass during its renovation - the doorknob I mean. The knocker and letterbox were new. Through the entrance hall was the Surgery used by at least four doctors - Simkin, Collington, Phillips and Macaulay. When the furniture and fittings were removed blankets of black cobwebs festooned the walls - quite a sight! The floor joists were rotten and the boards (fixed to each other with iron pegs) were

removed and a DPC and concrete put down. There was the outline of a former door from this room to the waiting room across the yard. A central door led to the 'Dispensary' (a Victorian addition) through which patients had to pass to the Surgery. It had no hot water system, just a geyser over the sink. A long pine table with thick legs and linoleum cover had been used for dispensing - it was in a disgusting state! We had these two rooms made into one with a big RSJ. The door to the waiting room was bricked up and a window fitted. There was a bedroom above overlooking the yard.

Also off the hall was a short passage with cupboard leading to a cheap, common brick extension facing south which had housed the doctor's baby-grand piano - a Collard and Collard. Beneath the floor was an ancient well made of small red bricks which had once been outside the main house. We had it filled in. Its iron pump remained.



Door and cupboard keys from Cross Bank House, 1967

A staircase to the landing with an extension to the bathroom and rear bedroom led from the hall. It had a semi-circular arch and signs of a door once fitted no doubt to keep out draughts! Again an old wall was knocked through to the Victorian part. That staircase was very steep.

A cellar led off the hall which extended only under the Surgery. It had a fanlight to the east. It had a long thrall and square wine spaces. It had an arched brick roof and was bone dry - no water lying. The walls were damp of course through penetration. There were hooks in the ceiling possibly for hanging game, hams etc. The entrance door had original hand-forged latch and hinges. It had a flight of well worn brick steps. (Later this cellar was on record at Emergency Planning as a public refuge in the event of a nuclear attack in the Cold War).

In front of the house was a brick wall - not original as the bricks looked Victorian. It once proudly supported iron railings, no doubt removed during World War 2 for munitions. The copings were castellated and perished - they were replaced with half-moon red copings which are there today. We could not afford new railings. The gateposts were ugly common brick pillars. The old holly tree seen on the early photo was still there in the form of an old stump which had sprouted into a thick bush. We later uncovered fine cobblestones under the tarmac of the front path.



Cross Bank House 1983

We had happy days at Cross Bank! Memories of fund raising - coffee mornings, barbecues and jumble sales in front for the WI. Maggie Hill would rest on the wall and folk drop in for coffee. On the downside there were street brawls outside the Village Hall and Old Swan, youths banging on the knocker, trouble on the 'Bank' - even streakers up the lamp post! Twice there were RAC rallies going round the island all night into the small hours.

We well remember Mr Stanbridge's sheep going past the island up High Street!



Reception Hall 1983

The Critchleys' shop was a social centre. Mrs Snaith was next-but-one to Cross Bank. Mr Leech was across the island - a saddler. Next to him was Fine Fare with Edie in charge, then Mansfields and the Library in the Oddfellows Hall. We knew everybody, but life changed - developments in the Springfield, Home Close, Dover Street (horror of horrors 88 houses!), and Rectory Lane began, to name but a few!

I hope eventually to delve into the history of this site and the inhabitants of No. 14 High Street, but where does time go? I just hope I can eventually find enough!

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)