

The house we finally settled in at Branston was certainly old-established home, over 200 years old, and full of intriguing puzzles about its history. It was known as Ivy-Bank ^{IVY BANK} when we bought it, but my dad discovered from the records that it had originally been The Residence, and he rather liked that name, so we reverted to the older title.

I have since come to believe that it was built by one of the Curtois family when they were Rectors of Branston church, but there must always have been some kind of dwelling there ever since the first church was built, the two occupying a little island in the highest part of the village, which is usual for a church to be.

Extract from booklet "GRANDMA REMEMBERS - Being an account of a way of life now gone for ever, and on the whole, a good thing too."

Written for her Granchildren by Constance Rose Fletcher,
nee Lawrence. 1908 - 1986.

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Now I am told it is the Rectory again, the Georgian rectory of my time having been turned into flats.

It was madness buying that place as it was much too big for us; but my mother liked it and it was cheap. It could have employed cook and housemaid with a man for outside. We had a woman one day a week.

It was a snowy January day when we flitted, as we say in Lincolnshire. For some reason which escapes me now, I see my mother and I perched on packing cases in the kitchen by the light of one candle, with a bewildered Micky shivering at our feet. It must have been evening; we were cold and hungry, and our courage was at its lowest ebb as my mother wailed, "I don't know whether we've done the right thing or not, Con." And I could not reassure her; I had not wanted to leave the comfortable, happy life in Lincoln. However, we all cheered up when the furniture vans arrived and things began to happen. I would be about 14 or 15 then. 1922 - 1923

At first there was no bus service to Lincoln so it was carrier's cart every Friday, along the top road and down Canwick Hill. Coming back again, everyone had to get out and walk up the hill; it was very long and steep, and too much for one horse to pull us up. I never liked riding in the carrier's cart, it was too claustrophobic; too many people squashed in to too small a space, and one seemed too much aware of their short-comings at such close quarters. I am sure we strangers must have had a constricting effect on them, too. So we biked if at all possible. Later there were two bus services.

My own first thrill with the house was to find that we had a BACK stairs as well as the usual front ones. I chose the bedroom over the kitchen, up the back stairs, for myself, but there was access to it from the front of the house also. It was large, light and airy, with a window facing south and another large dormer type facing north, from which I one night watched a display of the Northern Lights, Aurora Borealis, very rarely seen in this part of Britain. My mother was visibly disappointed that I would have nothing to do with the room she had allocated to me in her own mind, which was a dressing room, through their bedroom. I was too big to go through my parents' bedroom to get to my own. I wanted freedom, to do as I liked in a quite separate part of the house. It was delightful.

The next excitement was to discover a row of bells hanging on coiled wire springs over the kitchen window. They were connected to the four principal rooms and the front door by wires, which when necessary, went through holes in the thick stone walls. Some of them actually still rang when a handle was turned on the wall of the room by the fireplace; very faint, rather stiffly, more like an echo from 200 years ago when they were in active use in a busy household. After the first delight had died down we left them alone, not wishing to break the wires.

Out in the yard, in part of an old cottage on the premises, lived an engine which pumped water up to a tank in the roof to serve bathroom and toilet upstairs. I think it was twice a week this engine went "phut-phut-phut" for half an hour, and I never did find out why it was called a donkey engine. If the engine failed for any reason, water had to be pumped upstairs by hand pump from the scullery sink, and that was hard work.

Also outside were two spacious wooden-seated closets, in two different parts of the premises, each in the convivial Victorian style of a two-seater; one even had a low seat for a child also. These conveniences caused a lot of ribald amusement among our friends and relations.

There were three pantries and you had to walk through all three to get from the dining room to the kitchen. One was the normal pantry, stone-slabbed shelves, the next I don't know what it was for, but it had shelves and deep drawers. The third had cupboards right up to the ceiling and shelves all around the walls, probably a store room. We used to make a joke of counting how many steps it took to get from the dining room to the scullery sink, 21 I think it was.



The drawing and dining rooms had inside wooden shutters let into the thickness of the walls at the side of the windows, and they still worked. Very stiff and creaky, with about 100 years' dust settled in the cavities behind, they were something we had never expected to find.

Below were two cellars with gantrys for barrels to rest on and shelves for bottles. The first time we explored down there, there were some of those obscene big black slugs crawling about, so I did not go down much after that. Sometimes I got the horrors wondering if those big slugs could ever crawl up the cellar steps and into the hall!

Up at the top of the house were three attic bedrooms, obviously maids' bedrooms, for there were wooden pegs driven into the walls for them to hang their clothes on; and what pegs! Over an inch thick they would be, hacked out from a tree branch, you could see the knife marks, about 10 inches long with a knob on the end. A wide shelf ran along the wall above the pegs.

Down again to the scullery there was a bricked-up fireplace and beside it, a blocked-up Dutch oven. I recognised that by the arch of bricks, and rushing outside, found the oven sticking out beyond the scullery wall. Outside in the yard, the coalhouse was enormous. We bought coal by the ton, and a ton of coal could be tipped in that place and not half fill it. One day, years later,

something was said by somebody about two bits of wall sticking out on one side of this "coalhouse" - "You could build a fire there"; and suddenly the penny dropped for me and I knew that it was a fireplace and this had been someone's cottage once, long before The Residence was built.

Later, when the coal had been used up, I was able to stand in this fireplace, and looking up, could see sky above; which proved that it was a chimney.

There were other puzzling features, such as a flight of stone steps going down into the earth for no apparent reason. I never did find out about them. Someone said it had once been a brewery manager's house, but that was within living memory. There was a cobbled yard where, they said, the barrels had been scrubbed out.

I have described the inside of this in detail, as, although you have all seen the many snapshots I took of the garden, you do not know about the inside. Of all the houses I have lived in, it is Branston that means 'home' to me although I lived there full time for only 4 or 5 years.

Before the move to Branston took place, my mother had been buying a lot of furniture at auction sales, all big stuff suitable to the big rooms. For a few months our Union Road house was like a furniture warehouse, and how the floors held the weight, I do not know. In some places one had to move around sideways, crab-wise. We made jokes about it, and laughed, of course.

The biggest item was a three-quarter size billiard table, which it was thought would be something of an interest for my father during the winter evenings. Which it was, and my dad always took great pleasure in his games of billiards. The table had to double as a dining table with a wooden top laid over it. Robin might just remember how high it was at meal times. It was grand for table tennis, though.

However, we soon found that the men of my dad's age in the village, farmers and farm workers mainly, had no acquaintance with the game of billiards. Having got the table there was no one to play on it.

That was the trouble with Branston. We never fitted in. The people of the village could not accept us as ourselves because we lived at The Residence. It set us apart. We were on easy dropping-in terms with the schoolmaster and his wife, with Harold Forman, the founder of the haulage firm, and the district nurse. The Rectory would not know us because we were Chapel. There was just one other family we would have liked to know, Parsons of the coal firm; but they had two teen-age children who were very noticeably albino, that is, they had pink eyes and white hair, and were so dreadfully self-conscious about this rather startling appearance that they came out of their walled garden very seldom, and when it did happen they slunk about the back lanes of the village and spoke to no one.



My father and mother.

Frank and Nellie LAWRENCE

who lived at 'The Residence' Branston, (formerly 'Ivybank')
from about 1922-23 to 1938-39.

I CAN REMEMBER A HEN JUMPING -

up to peck at a cabbage hanging in a chicken run in one corner of the garden; so now I remember we did keep fowls for a while, but were not very successful with them, so they did not last long.

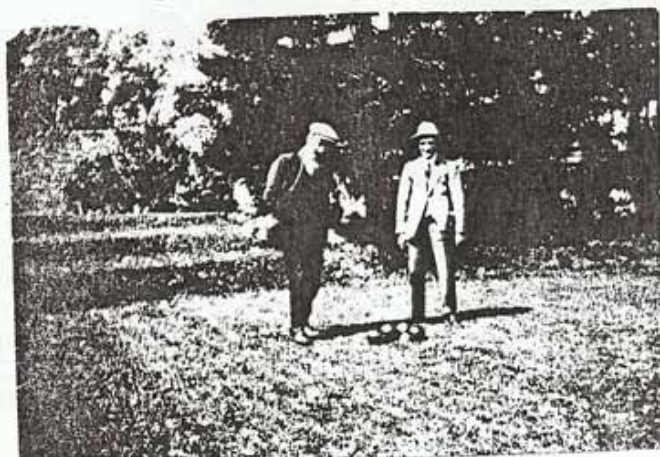
A snap shot reminds me that there was a swing which my dad fixed up between a silver birch and a Scotch pine. When I did not know what else to do I would go there and swing, sometimes with great vigour. Here is Vera on the swing.



The lawn at the front of the house would have been comfortably big enough for a tennis court if it had been level. As it was, it made a bowling green for my father and uncles to enjoy playing bowls on. There were three terraces carved out of it in about a half circle, and these were a frightful task to keep mown in the days before power mowers. It had to be hand shears.

We were told that years ago a military colonel or captain lived there. Quite likely that was when the house was named The Residence, if the military gentleman had served in India. The residence of the British Government representative in an Indian state was called The Residence.

According to what the old people told us, the soldiers, who lived in the Barracks on Burton Road (it would be the Old Barracks) were sometimes marched out to Branston on fine afternoons. The captain liked to sit them on the lawn, give them the lecture for the day, perhaps on Tactics, or Strategy in Army Warfare; then feed them a lavish tea, before they marched back to barracks in the cool of the evening. After a while the captain had the idea of scooping out most of the soil of the lawn to a depth of about 3ft, or 1 metre, and so making three terraces for the men to sit on in greater comfort, as you can just see here.



It must have been a large quantity of earth to move. And by some small miracle, as I sit here quietly thinking back, and writing, inspiration comes to me over the distance of 50 years, and I know for the first time what he did with it.

Outside the kitchen door was the vegetable garden, where were those steps I mentioned going down into the earth. That part of the village is on a steep slope, the church being built, as was usual, on the highest point of the village. So a mighty retaining wall was constructed on the street boundary to the property, then all that needed to be done was to man-handle the excavated earth from the lawn and tip it into this sloping hole to level it up into a vegetable garden. I know who did the moving, too. It would be - "Off with those red coats, lads!"

Here are two prints showing the back of the house, taken from the now level vegetable garden. They show quite clearly that the three pantries, with the dressing room above, were a later addition to the original building.

