

Sheerland - The House

Architecturally a conglomeration. Originally, we were told, a decent small stone built house, later adapted and enlarged for one of the Derings, and in Grandfather's time, an extra storey added to the front part to form a large room for dances when Aunt Lottie was a girl.

Ground Floor Front. A massive central door opening to a passage and solid stairs with grained woodwork. On the left Father's office, all cabinets bookshelves, documents, safes and a heavy copying-press and bundles of papers. On the right Mr. Benton's office.

The passage led to a lobby with an immense ^{STORE} state-cupboard and the lobby opened to the kitchen and to the Conservatory linking the front block with the rear block (Dining Room, Hall, Drawing Room and downstairs lavatory). The Conservatory was used as an extra Sitting Room and was always gay with flowering plants. Our canaries cages hung in the Conservatory.

The best window of the kitchen gave on to the Conservatory, making the kitchen rather dark. Its back window over the stone sink, overlooked the backyard, the pump (our water supply except for rain water) the woodlodge and other ^{OUT} odd buildings. A range served for all cooking and it heated water which could be drawn off from a polished brass tap on the left hand side. (In our barefoot days we used to be taken to the kitchen to have the mud washed off our feet) when we returned from one of our twice-daily walks).

Beyond the kitchen a brick-floored dairy where the milk stood in shallow pans for the cream to rise. Butter was of course made at home in the Devonshire fashion, stirring the ripe cream by hand in a Bowl and subsequently slapping the butter on a wooden board to get the butter milk out. Repeated washing followed. What a treat the occasional "shop-bought" butter was.

A covered passage led from the kitchen to the wash-house where Mrs. Miles and Lottie Pile toiled every week.

The Stable held, I think three horses and in the coach-house were the wagonette (the "head" suspended from the roof when not required) the dog cart and later the pony trap.

The Cow House lay on the other side of the road.

The Dining Room inevitably had red wallpaper and there was a solid Mahogany dining table and set of chairs, two armchairs, a bookcase or two and a rosewood sideboard. I think a Turkey carpet.

The Drawing Room was of course green papered and, fashionably, had a "cosy corner" a piano an elaborate overmantel and a selection of chairs. A window overlooking the backyard was covered with "stained-glass effect" semi-transparent paper. The Drawing Room fire was lit on Sundays only except when there were visitors or at party times. I think most of the woodwork was grained and varnished. There was a Silver Table.

Meat Safe

At Sheerland the meat safe was hung in a tree between the back yard and back gate. It was raised and lowered by a pully^e. A Meat safe was a sort of cupboard (sometimes incorporated in a larder) with at least one side of wire gauze or perforated zinc. Its purpose was for hanging the meat to make it tender. The wire gauze let in air and kept out flies. William Hinds of Gillet, Smaiden was said to hang his legs of mutton in his Oast.

Father's Office

There was a solid copying press for making copies of important letters. The process involved inserting the letter between sheets of damp flannel and screwing down a heavy iron plate.

As a very great treat I was allowed to help count the money, only coppers of course, when the time came for the Hop-pickers (Hoppers) to be paid. Pennies were poured out from the Bank's linen bags and counted into piles of twelve.

To clean his pen nibs Father always had a little glass jar of ^{SHAG} spot. Pen-wipers made of rounds of woollen cloth, laboriously pinked round the edges and secured in the middle, were often made by us to give as presents to grown-ups.

Sometimes, when Father had many cheques to sign, I was allowed to stand behind him with a wad of blotting paper and lean over to blot each signature.

Dressing Room

Part of the equipment was a leather strop on which Father sharpened his razors. The razors were in a leather case, seven of them, one for each day of the week and they were used in strict rotation.

There were DUMB BELLS, known as MEME and JEME. There were rows of boots, very carefully looked after, with ^{PIECE} 3-pine wooden trees to preserve their shape.

For a treat we were sometimes allowed to put the trees in the boots, first the toe portion then the heel portion and finally the middle section, taking great care to distinguish R from L. A Boot jack for removing Riding Boots - the trees for these were very tall of course.

Upstairs, in front Mother's and Father's room over Father's office, rather overfilled with a big double bed, a yellowish dressing table, a tall boy and a wash stand behind a screen. From this room opened Father's Dressing Room over the lobby. This had a fixed bath supplied with cold water from the rain water tank in the roofspace. Hot water was carried up from the kitchen for Father's sponge bath and he heated his shaving water on a little spirit stove.

The Night Nursery was over Mr. Benton's office. An awkward twisting passage with linen cupboards led from the front of the house to the back and the servants' bedroom (shared) opened off this over the kitchen.

Winding stairs led from the Landing to the Nursery and Schoolroom.

On the top landing was a sort of cupboard with basin supplied with running cold water. ? Rainwater from the tank. At the top of the Front

Stairs a half-landing and a short flight of about 5 stairs led to the Bachelor's Room (later occupied by Miss Allen and me) the Spare Room, over the Dining Room and the lavatory where all the woodwork, including the seat, was painted claret red.

We were not usually allowed to use the Front Stairs for fear of wearing out the Turkey carpet.

There were vast linen cupboards on the landing leading to the Nursery Stairs.

Ness remembers men with mud-scrapers on Saturdays on the road in front of the house.

In the Back Yard

Our Rabbit Hutches

Pump

Shed where boy cleaned shoes (one brush marked DURT) chopped firewood etc.

When the fishmonger called he used to fillet the fish in the backyard, the cats sitting round anxiously waiting for the bones.

Some ashes in the housemaid's cupboard (? on the stairs leading to the Nursery), once started smouldering. Miss Allen spotted this, and shouted "Water, water! Quick, quick!" I went and looked at the large water jug on the night-nursery wash-stand, decided it was too heavy to lift, so did no more about it. (Lois)

On Sunday mornings at breakfast time we used our soiled serviettes for the last time. If forgetfully one of us started to fold her serviette and put it tidily in its ring there was a great cry of "Don't fold up".

Baths

We bathed in a sponge bath in front of the Nursery fire the hot water had to be carried up by Nurse from the kitchen. We soaped ourselves with flannels then sponged I think the soap was usually ERASMIC. Cans of hot water were of course carried up to Mum, to Miss Allen and to any visitors, morning and evening, the can carefully covered with a folded towel to keep the water hot.

We cleaned our teeth with "Precipitated Chalk" price 4ozs. for one penny. This was kept in a small cut glass bowl with a lid.

On the landing, almost at the top of the nursery stairs, under a flap, were two blue and white hand bowls with cold taps from the rain water tank.

Mr. Benton

Father's understrapper for the daily detailed work of the Pering Estate. A shortish rather stocky man with a shiny red face and a squeaky voice and a neat walrus moustache. He always wore breeches with very well polished leather leggings. He lodged with Mrs. Wise and very frequently one of us was sent up with the message "Please, Father would like to speak to Mr. Benton when he is at liberty".

Social Calls

This formality was carefully observed. A card case was "de rigueur" and the practice of calling on new comers. Their attendance at Church on Sunday signified they were ready to receive callers.

A lady called only on a lady	1 card
A gentleman called on a lady <u>and</u> gentleman	2 cards

Leaving a card with one corner turned down meant that the card had been personally delivered, and not sent by a servant. P.P.C. written on a card meant "pour prendre ^{CONGRÉ,} coupe. The cards must of course be of regulation size and be engraved in copper plate not printed. Every hall table was equipped with a card tray and the parlour maid opening the front door would proffer a card tray to the visitor.

Mother and Father always made a point of going to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition each year, buying an illustrated catalogue which served the purpose of the modern "coffe-table book".

They also loved Musical Comedies and bought piano scores (these scores were often arranged for dancers). Gilbert and Sullivan. I never remember them going to a Concert or Opera or to any theatre other than Musicals.

The dog-cart, which Father used every day to drive himself into Ashford, was a spanking two-wheeled affair with two seats in front and two very narrow shelf-like seats at the back, exceedingly uncomfortable especially when the driver adjusted them to balance the cart. This was said to ease the weight for the horse when going uphill. We sat crouched forward.

As children, we were strapped in and for a treat were allowed to drive "the short reins". The dog cart would be put up at the Saracen's Head. The waggonette too when A.B. took us shopping. Never did she have to carry any sizeable parcel. Errand boys would be sent to put the packages into Mrs. Burrow's trap.

What a chilly business travelling was in cold weather. Rugs gave some protection and we were always made to put on our thick coats a quarter of an hour before starting out, so as to get thoroughly warm. We were brought up to go barefoot, winter (except in the snow) and summer, wet or fine, mud or dust. This was supposed to prevent our catching cold. The result, of course, flat and spreading feet and much recourse to chiropodists when we grew up. We must have worn boots in winter and later were made to wear the then fashionable high-lacing boots that had to be put on and laced up, unlaced and taken off before and after our twice-daily walks. Long cloth gaiters, buttoned to above the knee. When a tag came off a bootlace, what difficulty there was in lacing up boots.

How monotonous in retrospect was our daily routine. Breakfast in the dining room, the monitress for the week saying grace and opening the door for the grown-ups. The greater part of the morning in the Schoolroom, starting with Prayers and a Hymn. Then Scripture (Old and New Testament or Church History) then a variety of lessons including piano, all by our governess. We quarrelled sometimes of course and would hurl insults at one another. A favourite insult was

O what an Antique ANTIGUA

Fig you are.

On one occasion Mum forgot who was Monitress for the week and asked someone else to say Grace. The result was a gabbled dialogue.

Mother

She could, but rarely did, sing well.

She could accompany a singer, sight read or vamp.

She could twitch her ears and twitch her scalp.

Ness loved parties. Once Lois was invited to a babies party and I to an older party. Ness enquired plaintively "Why isn't there a party for middle-aged children?"

Mother could tie a knot in a cherry stalk in her mouth. She had a delightful improvised piano piece called "Little Stream" illustrating all the places the stream flowed past, hymns when it passed a Church, songs from a school etc.

Beggars were few. From time to time a little barefoot boy with an accordion would call, singing his only song "Little Sweetheart come and kiss me". He was given a penny and I suppose some food.

The indigent poor, when past work, had to end their days sadly in the workhouse, then considered an unbearable disgrace.

Occasionally a barrel organ came, sometimes with a tiny monkey in a red coat. Ness remembers seeing a small child in a sort of wire netting cage on the barrel organ. I recall vaguely hearing that the barrel organ man had been attacked in the village because he made his wife pull the organ up the hill. I think but am not quite sure that once a dancing bear was led round by his owner.

Christmas presents

We were encouraged to make Christmas cards and calendars and we always tried to make something for Mother and Father. I remember toiling evening after evening at an embroidered table cloth for Mother, at the last Nurse working at one corner while I worked at another.

When we were busy in this fashion, a red flag was flown on the Nursery stairs to warn Mother not to enter without knocking and giving us time to hide the "secret".

On Christmas morning we would wake early and assemble outside Mother and Father's door singing "Christians Awake". Christmas stockings (Father's ^{buying} ~~hunting~~ stockings borrowed for the occasion) always had an orange in the toe and a cracker sticking out at the top.

Lois, as a baby, regarded Nurse Harmer as her indispensable slave. When Nurse wished to go down to the kitchen for a cup of tea, I used to be made to sit on the floor with Lois, our backs to the door (and the screen) and show her the pretty pictures in one of our books. Nurse would slip out quietly. After a few minutes Lois would notice her absence and despite all my cajoleries, start to cry. Ness, seeing Lois cry, would cry in sympathy until I, in despair, joined in.

I remember being told that after I was born and the work was too much for Ada, (the cook general from Barnstaple who was secured by a small ad. in the Church Times, and stayed for years) Mum engaged a Nurse-Housemaid who took us out for walks in the afternoons. At one time there was a nurse called May, a dark haired girl whom I heard Mum describe as "very ample".

Mr. Glennie the blind piano tuner visited us periodically, and we were always made to go and "speak to him". He had a thick white film over his eyes (? cataract) which made him alarming in appearance, even though he was a familiar figure with his neatly clipped beard. Like everyone else who came to the house, he always received "refreshments". Ness says he came on a push bike with his sister in a trailer. I liked Mr. Glennie and used to show him my new toys, which he made a lot of.

Ness () Granny used to knit us thick wool night socks for Christmas. Once I found a doll's saucepan in the toe of mine. How we loved our dolls house, one storey each sent from Ulcombe after Auntie Daisy was married. Old Punch brought it in a horse drawn van.