

Elbeck House

Occupants: The Irvines

Robin Born Glasgow but lived in Shipley since he was three

Julie Born Bingley

Alexander Age 16 Born Bradford

James Age 14 Born Bradford

We arrived in Litton from Bingley in October 1996. Robin, a solicitor, had merged his practice and was undertaking consultancy work in Bradford on a three days a week basis, and it was this which decided us to move to the countryside; travel to Bradford for three days a week would be bearable. James was just about to start at secondary school, and Alexander had just completed his first year at Bradford Grammar School, so moving schools would not be too detrimental to them. We would enjoy the benefits of the countryside.

We found Elbeck House which was large enough to accommodate Robin's mother, a lady in her 90s, who would move with us, as well as ourselves and our golden retriever, Dougal.

Soon after moving in, we moved out to Manor Cottage for a month while various works were carried out at the house. The rooms used as a teashop and gallery by Ron and Margaret Walker, the previous owners, were converted into a "granny flat" for Nana. We believed this part of the house had been a dairy, but Eddie Chapman remembers it being a stable with hayloft above and stone steps to the loft outside.

Unfortunately, Nana died a few months later in March 1998, and her flat is presently used as a letting cottage.

The House

The house has a datestone over the front door of 1707 but it is believed a building has existed on this site since the 17th century or even before. It is listed Grade II for the inglenook fireplace in the lounge and the hooded mouldings over some of the south facing windows.

There have obviously been many changes to the house over the years. Ron and Margaret Walker were both accomplished artists and they built a pottery on to the rear of the house incorporating the former back door - we have used this and their coalshed and converted them into a large dining kitchen and utility room. We have also made a downstairs cloakroom at the bottom of the stairs from a part of the boiler

room. The main front entrance (although hardly used by visitors) has become a hall (Ron and Margaret had a utility room here) and the door into the lounge from the hall has been moved towards the inglenook fireplace. David Claughton, our builder, uncovered the flue to what we believe was a bread oven at the side of the inglenook whilst carrying out work here. The former tea room, gallery, toilet and pantry now comprise a kitchen, bathroom, living/dining room and double bedroom - the letting unit. (We still have the wooden sandwich board announcing "The Little Gallery" in the garden shed). A garage was built in the croft, but this had to be constructed to look like a farm building to obtain planning approval from the National Park.

← Fireplace drawing

The title deeds show that the house was included with many other lands and pastures in Litton in a settlement deed dated 1869, the settlement only coming to an end in 1952 when the house and lands were conveyed to Philip Henry Conyers Walker (presumably the Judge Walker talked of today as still owning land in and around Litton). Interestingly, the 1869 document describes the land around the house as Hell Beck lands east side of water and west side of water and presumably this is the origin of the house's name. In other later deeds the property is referred to variously as Ellerbeck, Elbeck House Farm and Elbeck.

Presumably, during the life of the settlement, the house and surrounding land were farmed, with rents going to the Trustees of the settlement. We believe the farm was known as Castle Farm early this century, and it has been farmed by Jim Spencer, Tommy Hannam, and John Willy Chapman. The Hannam family moved here from the Queen's Arms. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Coates moved to Elbeck in about 1945. Their son, Laidler, married and lived here in 1953, his parents by then having gone to Croft House. (One of Robin's aunts recalls staying at Mrs. Coates's bed and breakfast in Croft House). Laidler and his family left Elbeck in 1961 or 1962 as he could earn more money working for Tilcon at the quarry.

In September 1962 P.H.C. Walker conveyed Elbeck House and lands to Albert Ernest Stockdill of Bettashoes, Manningham Lane, Bradford. Mr. Stockdill did not keep the property for long before transferring it to Dorothy Mary Holmes in October 1962.

For the Holmes family, this was their holiday home. It is believed the family business was in the manufacture of packing cases, but in any event, they completely renovated the house, re-roofed it and it became a five bedroom house. They used workmen from their company in Bradford in the renovation of the house, and it appears that there are a number of bricks used in the re-construction of certain parts which would not have been used by local workmen who would have used the products produced at the local quarry.

In June 1970 Mrs. Holmes sold Elbeck House to a Martin Richard Bendelow. He had a London address, was a colleague of Sir Keith Joseph, Leeds MP. and this was to be his country home. He also carried out many changes; he created a larger lounge by taking down the wall between the lounge and the adjoining room, and he created a dressing room from an end bedroom. He had further plans for the property, but these were cut short by his involvement in drug dealing of some sort. He had converted the very western barn into cottage accommodation for his mother, and this was sold in due course as a separate property.

Elbeck House was put up for sale by auction when it was bought by Ron and

Margaret in February 1975. Ron and Margaret had five children who grew up here and attended local schools. In 1980 they sold their "garage" (the unconverted barn in the middle) to Tony and Mary Oldham who live there now, and constructed the pottery to the rear of the house. The teashop was only open for a short time, as they found they would wait all day for the walkers to call in, only for 20 or so to call en masse at 3:30 in the afternoon, so this was not a viable proposition.

The Ghost

During our conversations with Ron and Margaret, we asked, rather tongue in cheek, are there any ghosts? There was a long silence and then Ron spoke and said that they had seen none, but to speak to the locals! When we first moved in, James came home from school and said that one of his friends had a computer listing of ghosts(!) and that Elbeck House featured in the list, but with the comment that there had been no sighting for over 20 years. James declined to find out more about this listing; however, we have spoken with the locals.

The story goes that the farmhand sleeping in a certain room would find himself pinned to the bed in the middle of the night and unable to move. The room with the ghost was the end bedroom, now converted into a dressing room. It was always very cold in this room and when the Irishmen (hired for the haymaking) slept in this room, they used to put the rugs from the floor on to the bed to keep warm. The door to the room fastened with a sneck - but no matter that the door was closed at night or even wedged shut, it was always open in the morning.

The Coates family never saw anything during their stay at the house, but according to Garnett Lund, if you wanted to get rid of a farmhand, you put him in this room and the ghost would do the trick! (or is this a little fanciful embellishment to the story over the years?)

When the house was re-roofed, the ghost/spirit is supposed to have flown out, and certainly we have seen nothing nor felt anything so far!

The Children's View

Alexander

It is difficult being so far from everything; however, it is good because I am able to play cricket for four different teams, School (Ermysted's), Littondale, Wharfedale Under 18s and Wharfedale 2nd team. I've seen no ghost and it is peaceful here. There's lots of wildlife - herons, kestrels, buzzards - and on one occasion the school bus driver stopped outside Hawkswick Cote to let us watch a deer heading towards Hawkswick.

James I hate living here - it's so far away from my friends and everything.

Mum Well, don't worry, in three or four years' time, you'll be off to College or University

James

Yes - and I won't be coming back!!

The reality of living in Litton three years on

We spend a lot of on petrol and a lot of time travelling up and down the dale ferrying boys to rugby, football, cricket, weekend work at The Tennant Arms and the occasional disco at Kettlewell or Cracoe besides going to the office; it is pleasant in summer, but tedious on long dark wintry evenings.

We are settled here and we enjoy living here; the locals are very friendly even though we suppose we'll always be offcumdens. When the sun shines, the view from the house is marvellous - it is in fact beautiful all the time, but when the rain rains and the mists come down, there is no view at all, and Hell Beck is an entirely appropriate description of the raging torrent at the bottom of the garden! We wouldn't go back to Bingley!

