

Croft House is owned by John and June Rawlins. John was born in Leeds in 1948 and spent his early life in Collingham. He knew Liffordale as he grew up, because his father fished the Skiffers and stayed at the Falcon in Bruchlife. John became a journalist, living in London until 1987 when he joined a City firm to open a Leeds Office to service Northern clients.

I was born in Bradford in 1941 and have spent most of my life in Yorkshire, including 18 years on the East Coast. I visited the Dales often as a child and, when a student, used to drive up with my fellow students to visit the Pubs. I knew that my ex-brother-in-law John Valentine had spent some of his hard, hippy years at Elbeck, but I had never imagined living here myself until May 1990.

June Rawlins

CROFT HOUSE

Our first sight of the outside of Croft House was on May-Day Bank Holiday in 1990. It was a hot sunny day and we thought the house looked marvellous with three copper beech trees in the garden, their buds bursting into colour. The following day we were shown round by Mr Rushby, from Arncliffe. We were smitten. On returning to the Estate Agents I told them that under no circumstances were they to sell the house to anyone else; we wanted it. We were looking for more space, a garden and peaceful surroundings. In due course we moved in on July 7th 1990, another sunny day. We were delighted to have arrived.

Two weeks and three water failures later, John was threatening to go back to London where there was the Thames Water Board, hot and cold running water and lavatories that flushed. We finally settled for repairs to the existing water system with, as a backstop, the possibility of a borehole. The adviser who came to see us was also a water diviner who told us where we would find water. We are still coping with the old system.

When we arrived, our Company, which advises companies listed on the Stock Market, had offices in Leeds and London. Today with modern communications, we can work from home with the help of a personal assistant. Vital information is received by satellite through well-hidden dishes to the rear of the property as demanded by the National Park. The house has well-proportioned rooms without being enormous and is ideal for business entertaining and family visits, which happen frequently.

We have noticed the Dale changing as we have lived here. More 'offcumdens' arriving. Farmers diversifying as times got harder. The cost of transport has increased considerably, making life more difficult for people working in the local economy.

→ Croft House has changed little since we arrived. We installed double-glazing and a new boiler. David Claughton has made built-in cupboards and bookshelves. Planning consent to convert

the barn was obtained in 1991. Over the years, it has slowly been transformed and extended. The next project is a modern septic tank system. We use it as an annexe and when the bathroom is installed, we foresee using it for visiting grandchildren who like noisy music and their own space.

The garden was badly neglected on our arrival in 1990. It is now very different. We have created a herbaceous border in the walled garden, planted a second box hedge from cuttings and more will follow. Two holly bushes already there in the 1920s have been restored to their original shape. We planted as seedlings a horse chestnut tree and silver birch, which is now twenty feet high. When the old greengage came down in a storm, it was replaced with a quince - we have yet to see fruit. Dangerous evergreens have been felled and replaced with rose shrubs, flowering shrubs and a marvellous rambling musk rose, grown from a cutting from Mrs Yeadon. Virginia creeper has been introduced from our house in France, also a hazel tree.

We have a menagerie of dogs and cats, who enjoy the freedom of a large country property. Occasionally we have seen deer, hares and foxes. This year there is a family of six buzzards but we have seen single ones previously. We have two bird tables which are always busy; we see the occasional nut hatch. This year a garden warbler nested in the winter ^a jésmine and reared four young. In spring we are sometimes dive-bombed by a nesting blackbird, who returns to the holly bush annually.

Several people have told us our house is haunted by a young woman. One of the local residents has seen a girl in a blue dress in a top-floor window, when the house was empty. We have not yet met our 'ghost' but there are no bad vibes, so she must be a friendly spirit, happy in such a comfortable and much loved house.

Anne

Rawlings.

It seems that during the course of the twentieth century, Croft House changed functions more than any other building in the village. Thought to have originally been an eighteenth century longhouse with a barn in the western end, the first alterations were identified as nineteenth century during the listed buildings survey in 1988. The barn had been turned into a kitchen, which functioned until the mid 1970s when it was moved to the eastern end of the house.

Saving printing blip

Harry Battersby (born 1911) recorded some of his memories of the house in his notebook. He noted that water for Barn Garth was 'collected from the trough in the wall in Slinger's Fold, next to Croft House', until his father Arthur Battersby, 'piped water from the lawn of Croft House to the Post Office in 1911.' According to his notes, Francis Gill the Registrar of Births and Deaths lived there about 1910 'and the Slingers'. The next owners were the four Myers sisters from Croft Cottage - Margaret, Katherine, Elsie and Annie. They were all qualified nurses and planned to run it as a nursing home. However 'they ran it as a guest house at first as they couldn't get enough patients and they went out nursing sick gentry .' He wrote that all the sisters 'were very good in looking after Grandma. Miss Jessie, who at that time would be District Nurse, was very attentive and in fact helped her to her end.' (Mrs Mary Battersby died in 1919 of throat cancer.) After the other sisters married, 'Katy was left on her own and ran the nursing home in first class style. She employed kitchen staff and nursing staff too.' She eventually retired to Linton, crippled with rheumatism.

'Croft House was sold to a Bradford garage proprietor about 1943, Cliff Emsley, who ran it as a guest house and did quite well.' Then followed the most bizarre period of all. The Rev Leonard Christie, vicar of Arncliffe from September 1950 complained, understandably, that he could not afford the upkeep of the very large vicarage. (Vicars at that stage were financially responsible for 'Dilapidations' of their homes.) He insisted that the Church buy Croft House and sell the Arncliffe Vicarage. They bought the house very reluctantly early in 1951,

needing a £3,800 loan. After a very unhappy period, the vicar left in September 1952, and the Church sold Croft House with undoubted relief but also with the substantial loss of £1,800. It was bought by Frank and Mary Coates for £2000, and turned back into a guest house, one subsequent visitor being the Bishop of Bradford, Donald Coggan, later Archbishop of Canterbury. It is not clear whether he was there before or after an important moment when Croft House was the centre of attention: its trees were decked with coloured lights, and dignitaries visited for the ceremonial switching on of the new electricity system for the whole dale in 1956, in 'pouring rain' as the Craven Herald reported.

It was sold again in 1964 to Derek and Margaret Cressey. Ten years later they decided to transfer the mailing and ordering side of their business, Magna Large Print, to Croft House. As business increased they needed more space, storing books in the Amerdale House cellar and Armistead Farm barn. When numbers reached 30,000 it was time to move to larger premises at Long Preston, and they sold Croft House in 1976 to Dorothy and Philip Carr who worked in Bahrein. After a year or two Dorothy and the children lived there permanently, until they moved to Ilkley in 1984 when Adrian and Charis Cussins bought the house. During their time the separate barn was converted into a studio for one of their friends. They had two small children. His work eventually took him to the University of California, and the house was sold to John and Anne Rawlings.