

## **Back in Time - 8 - A Letter from David Bratherton to Mrs. Roscoe at 2 Sandwich Road - 1986**

by John Rabbitt

The letter below, written in 1986, is from Dr. David Bratherton, a therapeutic radiologist at Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge to Mrs. Roscoe who lived at 2 Sandwich Road, thanking her for letting his son and niece visit his old family home.

David Bratherton grew up as a child in the 1920s living at 2 Sandwich Road. The letter describes the house and his experiences as a young child living in Ellesmere Park. This letter makes fascinating reading and gives us an insight to what life was like in Ellesmere Park in the 1920s. Dr David Bratherton had a very successful career at Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge. He was instrumental in establishing the Arthur Rank House, a specialist hospital for patients in the final stages of terminal illness. The first patient was admitted to Arthur Rank House in May 1981, and the Duchess of Kent officially opened the building on 15th October 1981.

One part of the letter that caught my eye and brought back memories of my father 'moderising' our 1930s house in Northolt, West London in the 1950s. On page 2, David Bratherton writes about the tracery in the front room, "I regret to say that this was removed as being hopelessly Victorian in the 50s."

Many of you may remember the TV do-it-yourself so called expert, Barry Bucknell. In the 1950s he presented the long running BBC TV series Barry Bucknell's Do It Yourself which apparently at its peak attracted seven million viewers. Bucknell often demonstrated techniques to 'modernise' older properties, typically using cheap materials including hardboard and plywood to cover up architectural detail such as period doors and fireplaces, which at that time were considered unfashionable. This earned Barry Bucknell the nickname 'Bodger' Bucknell.

By the 1990s, some critics argued that he was largely responsible for millions of home owners irreversibly altering their properties by removing architectural details in a way that is now considered rather irresponsible. It was often quipped that Barry Bucknell was responsible for more damage to British historical architecture between 1950 and 1955 than the damage the Luftwaffe did between 1940 and 1945.

I hope you enjoy reading this letter and looking at David's drawings at the end of the document.



**2 Sandwich Road and the Victoria Road Gate House -2020**



**2 Sandwich Road - 2020**

Ref. 2 Sandwich Road.

102 GRANTCHESTER MEADOWS  
CAMBRIDGE CB3 9JN  
TEL: (0223) 359025

10.10.86.

Dear Mrs Roscoe,

It was so kind of you to allow my son John and my niece Mrs Rowland to look over your house. I spent all my childhood in it and I am so glad that it has passed to someone who cares for it.

I was born in France where my father was an agent for a cotton firm at the height of the industry's fortune. He returned to England in 1920 when I was 6 months old and bought the house which was then known as number 1 Sandwich Road. We were very cross when we had to change the address to number 2. There was a very quaint arrangement whereby we collected the ground rent from the house next door before paying it over. We were then very well off with 3 elder girls at public school and with resources to improve the house considerably as you will see as I describe it. Later the recession hit us and with 7 children it was a hard struggle to keep going and the house suffered. The house next door was empty for 16 years during this time Father lost his agency and set up a factory making women's dresses which were sold to Littlewoods for 33p to sell finally for 50p! We lived in the house until 1954 when we sold it after some delay for £1250 including all the furniture. We were very glad to get the amount being the only offer over several months.

The Lodge cottage was originally for the gate keeper to the park who only let in desirable types and was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs Walker when we arrived. When they left father managed to get a Mr. and Mrs O'Brien installed and they had it until the early 50s. Mary O'Brien was the family treasure and her husband being a decorator was very useful papering the huge rooms. There was a similar lodge at the bottom of Victoria Rd and Chatsworth Rd., but the strict secrecy of the park had gone soon after we came. The lodge had a garden which came right to the back drive and up to our lawn. At a later date we enlarged the lawn to make a tennis court by taking some of the lodge garden and by cutting into the flower bed which in one place is much higher than the average.

The garden had two large pear trees in which as children we made tree houses. There was also a walnut between them. Across the lawn was a hawthorn and a laburnum and a copper beech. The drive had a lime tree and some apple trees.

The house next door was occupied ( that is No 11 Half Edge Lane) by mother's sister who was married to a fibrous plasterer who did the ornamental work on the ceilings of the ground floor rooms in 1921-22. We had a field telephone connecting the two houses. He put the glass on the top of the wall to stop boys stealing his apples. We had a stile over it which could be removed in case of need.

The large garage was a stable when we arrived but was converted to a double garage. There was a tall telegraph pole that we used to climb up till we were stopped. There was a conservatory on the back of the house but as it faced east it never grew anything much. At one time there was a fence around the coal hole to hide it but when this fell down it was not replaced. We built a massive swing in the back garden which had a trapeze on it. It has probably rotted away years ago.

The front door of the house had a stained glass panel with birds on it. The front room had a large bay window with wooden pillars supporting tracery. I regret to say that this was removed as being hopelessly Victorian in the 50s. There was a built-in sofa on the curve to the fireplace with a broad curved shelf above it and a display cupboard above this again. The fireplace had tiled sides and small shelves again with carved tracery. All in mahogany. There was a grand piano in this room and a chaise long and spoon backed chairs. Worth a fortune now.

The morning room communicated with the front room and had folding doors into the dining room. I have a picture of Christmas dinner in this room which I will send you.

The dining room had a massive oak fireplace with a lion's head, I think. There was also a carved fender with seats covered with leather. The door to the kitchen was blocked up in my day, probably to make the room warmer. We had to carry food all the way round and it was usually cold. There was a large oak table that could be extended to take 2 more leaves. We used to use them as slides when they weren't in the table.

The kitchen when we arrived had a heavy black-leaded grate which was removed in the early 20s to make way for the very latest Triplex grate which had an open fire heating a back boiler for the hot water. The oven doors had tiles in them. It was all very smart. Mother used to take a warm shelf out of the oven and wrap it in cloth to put in our beds for a bit of warmth. The whole house could be bitterly cold in winter and every door had a curtain on a rail behind it to try to stop the draughts. At the left of the Triplex was a big cupboard with drawers below it all built in. The drawers were worn where people had pulled them partly out to stand on to reach the shelves above. On the opposite wall was a sideboard with plate shelves above and a series of bells which worked by pulling wires in the various bed rooms. There was a more modern series of electric bells with indicators to show which room had rung. In the corner near the window was a small lift to take food up to the rooms above. It was never in working order in my time but we used to have lots of fun climbing up inside it. The window looked out into the conservatory.



The scullery had big glass cupboards all the way along the wall opposite the windows and covering the blocked up door into the dining room. There was a door leading down 4 steps into the conservatory. The back door had a large semicircular fan light above it. There was a big porcelain sink and an aged gas stove.

The middle cellar had a large stone table and was always cool so taht it served as fridge before thay came in. We had the roof strengthened and used it as our air raid shelter during the bombing. The nearest bomb to us was at the bottom of Half Edge Lane which made a great crater into which a car drove in the back-out and the driver was killed.

The wine cellar had a lot of shelves and a lot of dry-rot. I hope it has all been eradicated. We also had some in the floor above the middle cellar. The caol cellar was always full of a ton of caal. Wash day was a great ceremony with the fire lit under the copper in the back cellar and another in the grate in there. The washer woman Lizzie had huge red arms and would emerge from the steam with arms full of clothes which were put through the huge mangle. My mother was very advanced for her day and bought a large cylindrical washing machine called a Thor. You see them only in museums now. My brother thinks this was about the time the family fortunes slid a little as he remembers being sent to pay the higher purchase contributions on it. In those days this was not the thing to do; you had to save up for things or go without. How times have changed.

The front bedroom was atruly vast room. My wife and I lived in it soon after we were married and before we bought our first house in Didsbury. It was in the excessively cold winter of 1947 and we were never really warm. It was about that time that the marble fireplace was changed for a more modern and more eficient one.

I remember the next room well. On christmas day 1923 i reached up to the mantle piece to get my presents and my nightdress caught fire putting me in bed for 4 months and trully wrecking the festivities. We slept in a double brass bedstead which could be converted into a tent by tying the sheets to the top knobs.

Down 3 steps to the room we called the nursery which had a washbasin with a cupboard underneath and a gas fire. I spent 6 weeks in it having paratyphoid with a large sheet outside the door and mother coming in in clean white coat. No one else allowed near.

The study opposite had rosewood shelves with leather fringes. The food lift ran through it. My sister put a sink in and used it as a kitchen

The lavatory had a massive wooden seat. The bathroom had an amazing bath with a curved tall back which could be used either as a spray if you didn't want to get your hair wet or as a shower. The iron was so thick that the water never stayed warm for long. The hot cylinder was in an airing cupboard where we were put to dry off after a bath.

There was a box room on the top floor with an entry into the roof space which communicated with the house next door. We could also get up to the roof and as boys we made a trap door on to the roof where we could be safe in the v of the roof and observe the world below.

There was a very attractive room with the window coming down to floor level and sloping ceiling.

The room next to it was my room and I spent many midnight hours studying in it for my medical exams.

The room with a sink was used for photography and had the cistern in it and the tank.

Opposite this was a room with a beam in the ceiling which we fixed up with a trapeze. This was the upper part of the food lift where I think the rope went round a big pulley.

We had many parties in the house including a prefect's dance when I was at school and also several garden parties for the Eccles Presbyterian Church which used to be in Bright Rd.

There were 7 children so there was always something going on. There was little money in the depression years of the 30s but we made our own entertainment and spent many evenings round the piano singing student songs and items from Gilbert & Sullivan.

I have many happy memories and hope to call and see you when I am up there again. I worked at the Christie Hospital as a consultant Radiotherapist until 1955 when I came to Addenbrookes Hospital here retiring in 1984. I now spend my time showing tourists around this very beautiful town.

Yours sincerely,

*David Bratherton*

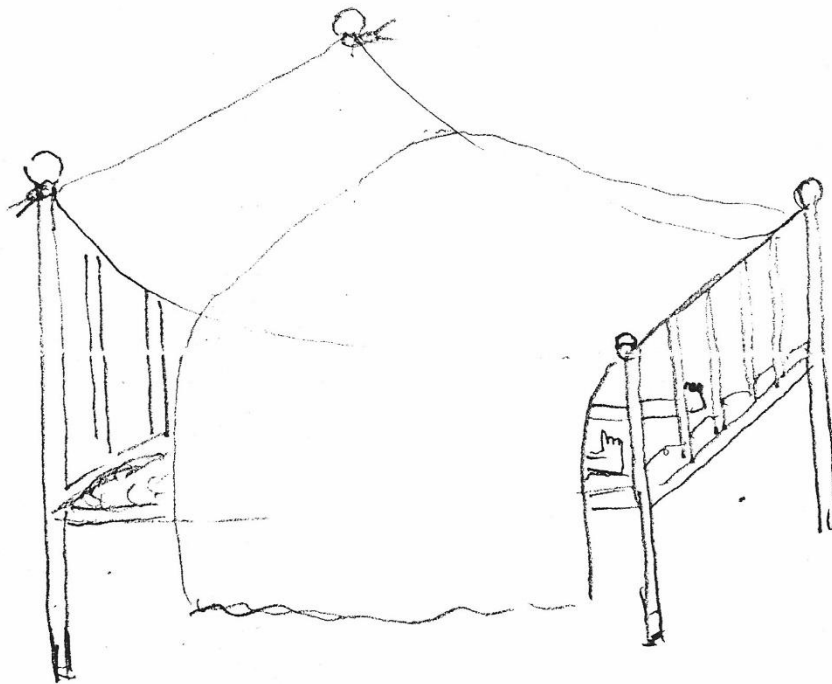
D.G.Bratherton.

P.S.

There was of course the soot from all the coal fires in the houses in Eccles with a good bit more from Trafford Park. If we gardened or climbed trees we were very soon blackened with soot. In the fogs which sometimes lasted 3 days it was almost impossible to see to drive. I remember a glass in the bathroom on a white tile which left a white ring on the black tile after a 3 day pea-souper.

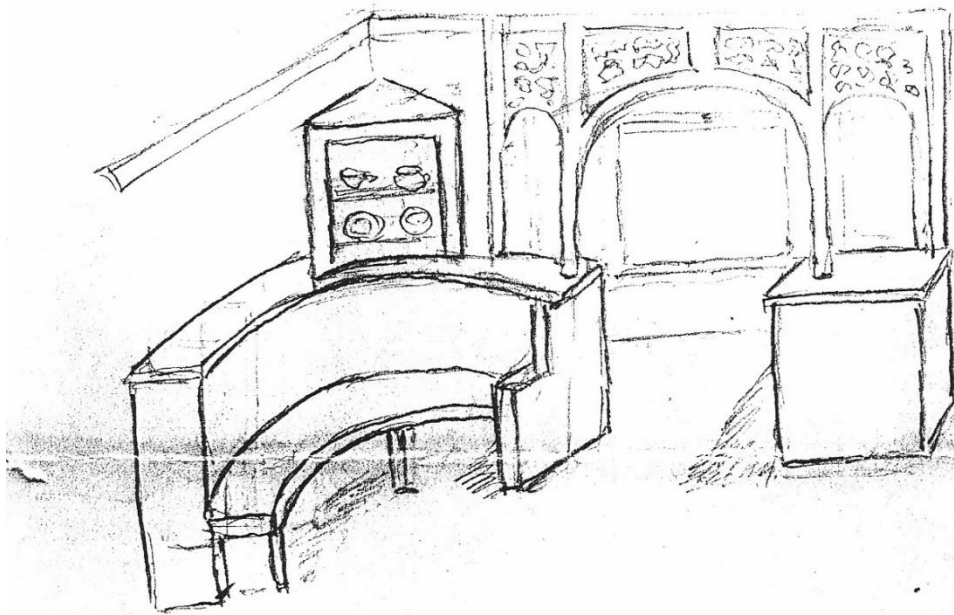
I hope things are better now.

I have tried to remember the front room woodwork which we thought was hideous but now would be all the rage.



TENT MADE FROM SHEETS  
ON BRASS BEDSTEAD





FRONT ROOM BAY WINDOW

✓ COUCH.

REMOVED IN 1950's

----- End of Article -----