

# The House



**N**orheads farm was close to Biggin Hill. It had 440 acres, 70 of which were woodland. Some fields were very steep, with heavy clay on the top fields, chalk on the banks and chalky loam on the lower fields. It was a very hard farm to work and exposed to the bitter winds at 700 feet above sea level.

The lease, which ran for 21 years, was very strict in some ways. The sporting rights were retained by the landlord. Tenants were allowed to shoot rabbits and pigeons, rooks and crows, but not any game-birds or hares. Any hay or straw sold off the farm had to be replaced by something of equal manurial value. The percentage of arable land, if increased, had to be reinstated at the end of the tenancy, or a large fine had to be paid.

The house was typically Georgian, built in 1715, with brick on the front, cheaper knapped flint on the back and a tiled roof. Two of the windows had been bricked in at the side to save paying some

window tax, the forerunner of rates. It was very large, with two enormous rooms at the front downstairs and two corresponding bedrooms upstairs, with a very wide oak staircase in between and a very large top landing. One of the bedrooms had a powder room off it where the gentlemen in Georgian times retired to powder their wigs. Between the main bedroom and the room my brother Rod and I used, there was a narrow passage which contained a type of blanket box, with a door into each bedroom. Perhaps the master who occupied the main room could go through to see what was in the maid's room when he wanted a bit on the side. Of course, quite often in years gone by, the master of the house did get extra favours from the servants.



The walls in my bedroom were covered in several layers of wallpaper. To decorate, another layer was added. The old paper was never removed as it held the plaster in place which bulged quite a lot.



There were many built-in cupboards in the house. In the front room, which we called the nursery, there were four large cupboards. We used to hide in them. There were two on each side of the fireplace; the top ones glazed and the bottom ones with solid wood doors.

In the other front room, the dining room, there were very large cupboards down one side, where bottled fruit and jam were stored. On one side there was a tall cupboard, which contained medicines. When I was about three or four I climbed on a stool and opened this cupboard and drank about half a bottle of horse liniment. It didn't seem to have hurt. It seems that animal medicines were fairly crude on the whole - one mixture was supposed to cure almost anything from mastitis to a bellyache! A bit like Lily the Pink's medicinal compound.



*Ruth, Rene and Dot in the garden*

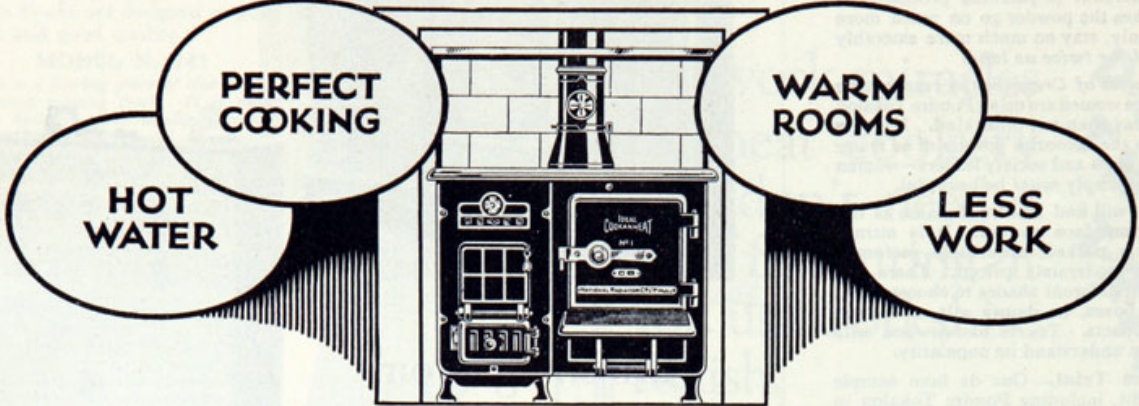
There was also a back staircase. At the back of the house there were smaller rooms, originally used by servants. A later addition was a kitchen with a slate roof and a stone floor. There was a dairy with a drain hole in the outer wall so that it could be washed down.

Halfway up the back stairs a bedroom had been made into a bathroom, which would freeze up in the winter.

Usually the only heating in the house came from the open fire in the front room, and a stove in the kitchen called the Ideal Cookanheat<sup>1</sup>, which supplied hot water as well as heating and oven. Before this was installed the cooking would have been done in the dining room, where the cooking tools remained long after. The stove was reasonably efficient, although one day it almost burnt the house down. The maid put on paraffin when the stove was already hot, and was badly shaken up with singed eyebrows. This also brought down the register plate above the stove.

**ENJOY NEW COMFORT THIS WINTER**

**IDEAL  
COOKANHEAT**



**HOT WATER**

**PERFECT COOKING**

**WARM ROOMS**

**LESS WORK**

Save time and money by installing the Ideal Cookanheat and securing these home essentials *all from one fire*. Burns Coke or Anthracite—smokeless. Installations can be effected now and the purchase completed by instalments.

*Write for Booklet ZC 1 post free.*

**NATIONAL RADIATOR COMPANY**  
LIMITED.

2, National Avenue, HULL, Yorks. LONDON SHOWROOMS: 441, OXFORD ST., W.1.

The dining room had a very large fireplace with seats inside and cupboards on each side. One of these was used for storing 12-bore cartridges to keep them dry. Sometimes they must have got hot, but they never exploded.

<sup>1</sup> Image from <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk>



This fireplace was reputed to be the largest in Kent, and was used for smoking bacon. Only one pig was slaughtered at a time, and after being bled and eviscerated, was cut up. Some meat was used fresh, including the offal, and the remainder was salted with the inclusion of molasses. Salt was rubbed in for two weeks, then the pieces, usually both sides, were hung in the big chimney and smoked for another two or three weeks, with oak sawdust put on the fire.

This fire was terrible for filling the room with smoke, which could sometimes be cured by either removing the cushion stuffed in the door, or putting it in, depending on the weather. A hole was left in the door for this purpose.

We used to entertain large numbers of friends and neighbours in the dining room on special occasions, such as parties or after-shoot Boxing Day dinners. On the days when these dinners were held the smoke would sometimes belch out from the fire and fill the room, gathering at its thickest on the ceiling. The diners would sit lower and lower to avoid it.

Before electricity was connected in 1937 oil lamps were used. Our own electric plant consisted of 60 2-amp accumulators connected in series, charged by a generator powered by a petrol engine. As this unit was old, the electric light went off as soon as the motor stopped. It was most uneconomic. In my bedroom the flex to the ceiling light sparked when live. This shows how damp it was, and very cold.

The early radios up to about 1937 or 1938 were run by one dry battery and one small accumulator, which had to be charged regularly. It seemed quite amazing to get a radio which ran off the mains electricity and would keep running without fail, only of course after 1937 in our case.

There were two cellars in the house. One was for coal, and the other used for salting, baking and making cider. These were fairly damp and the coal cellar, by its very nature, was dirty as well.

There were two lavatories outside, one for the workers and one for the family. One of these lavatories had a cracked pan (probably broken by frost). This was never repaired so that in essence there was only one lavatory. The men never used this, and in fact there were no toilet facilities or a proper wash-basin for the staff, which, when you consider we were producing milk, would not be tolerated today.

The attics in the house had an area against the walls where the slope of the roof was boarded in, leaving a space behind in the shape of a triangle, with one or two doors in it. My sister Rene and I used to go into the space looking for starlings' eggs. At one place the only way out was backwards. It seems crazy now to do this because it was dark and cobwebby, horribly dusty, and we could have got stuck.

