

Restoring Ravenscroft

We purchased Ravenscroft, now Cleddon Hall, the birthplace of Bertrand Russell in April 1964. We were fascinated and loved the house and grounds from the start, setting about to restore both immediately. Our new home was exactly as the Amberleys had left it: the families that occupied Ravenscroft after young Bertrand and Frank Russell left must have moved their furniture in, and out, altering very little indeed.

The most important thing to be done in order to save the house was the roof, a vast and costly item. The lead had gone in many places, the massive chimney stacks were merely balancing, the mortar having gone, and the ornate shaped timbers around the facias were rotted. Contractors were engaged to tile the roof; meanwhile George scaffolded the front of the house, cross scaffolded the chimney stacks, which he re-built. He then took down the ornate facia timbers, which were used as a pattern to cut the new ones exactly the same. George then made good the tyrolean work, replaced many panes of broken glass, decorated the outside, finally removing the scaffolding. *The house now secure is ready to stand another 100 years.*

We requested a firm of consultants to lay out a colour scheme, comprising: traditional Wall-Papers, Carpets and Curtains in keeping with the house. We were then ready to commence the restoration of the inside.

It was our aim to renovate and not to alter the character of the house; however, some alterations had to be made. The servants Stair-case was removed, being no longer necessary.

*The entrance to
Ravenscroft,
now Cleddon Hall.*



We burned the paint off throughout the house. Obviously the first time this had been done, it revealed many of the carpenters' instructions on the woodwork. George re-wired and re-plumbed the entire house, installed a small bore central heating system. (Fortunately he is an Electrical Contractor and was able to carry out the latter three expensive projects himself.) He then fitted a new bathroom, cloakroom and toilets. Meanwhile I had steadily been painting the house, room by room, and once completed the Wall-papers were ready to go on. Everything had now taken on a light and different look. Finally when the Contractors laid the carpets, Cleddon Hall at last felt like home.

The Amberley Kitchen was just as they had left it - Flagstone Floor, Stone Sink, Kitchen Range; even the Amberley Kitchen Dresser still remained. George had to raise the top of the Dresser in order to remove it and there stuck on a piece of resin was a Black Edged Paper headed RAVENSCROFT JAN. 13. 1876. This was the funeral service of Viscount Amberley. We have not destroyed this, merely removed it. George designed an entirely new layout for this kitchen, very modern, yet very necessary; this has only just been completed. There remain two rooms not decorated - Amberley's Study, and his Dressing Room.

34 Acres of land remain with the house comprising: Garden, Large Walled Garden, Woodland and Parkland. Robert, our son, enjoys cutting the lawns with a Mini Tractor; this takes many hours every week. We spent every fine week end this Spring limbing as many large trees as possible, they look so well when taken care of. We have also put a small herd of fourteen beef cattle into the Parkland, which keep the grass well chewed down. The Amberley Tomb and Stone Table still remain, quite close to the house.

I trust these details are suitable for your journal and enclose a newspaper cutting showing a sketch of the tomb and stone table, a photograph of the entrance, which is on the side of the house and one of the Daffodil Beds and Lawn in front of the house. There were six more, but they were sent to Bertrand Russell who wrote asking if he might keep them. These have been busy, yet happy years and we have done very little photographing.

We have detailed drawings showing the complete layout of the house; these were needed in order to commence work, also a scale plan of the house and land. We could send these, if of any interest.

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