

THE BELL HOUSE, KINGSLAND 1969 - 1979



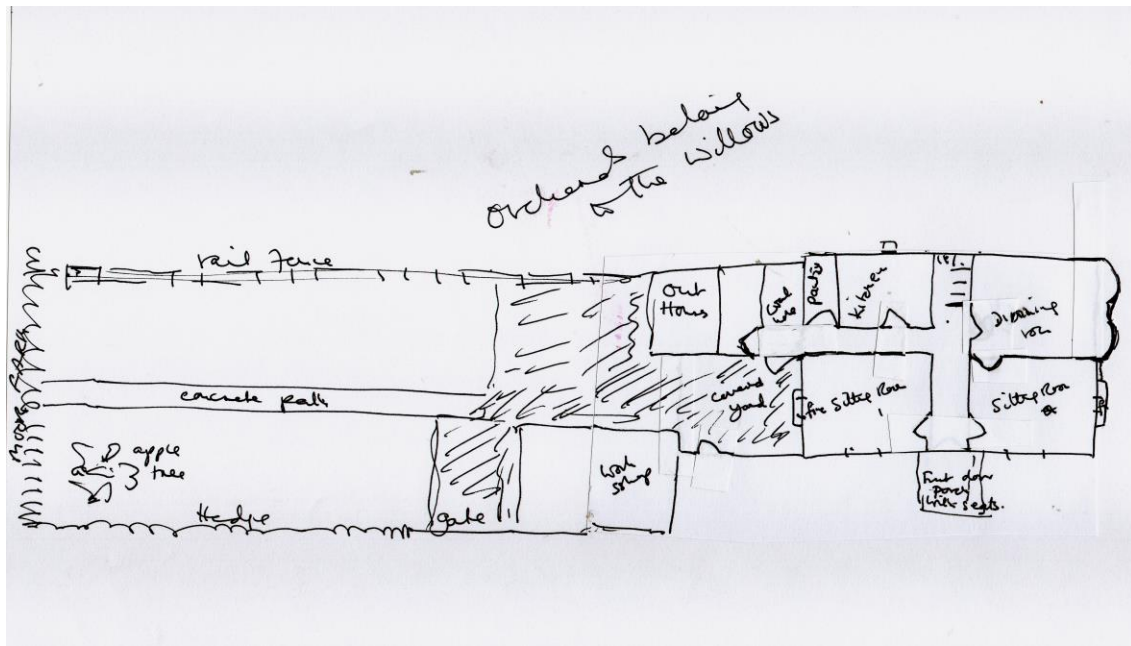
Marc Cameron-Swan and I moved into The Bell House in the Spring of 1969. We had come across the house almost by chance in the November of 1968, learning that it was for sale through Russel, Baldwin and Bright of Leominster and knocked on the door late one afternoon to be greeted by a most surprised Mrs Peters and her six children. They ALL showed us round. In one room sat an old man that they introduced as Gladstone.

The house seemed perfect and we were surprised to hear that it had been on the market for three years. By the time we arrived home in Birkenhead a week later we had agreed to buy the house for £5,100!

Mrs Peters had laid a fire in every grate and everything was scrubbed clean. We felt a bit guilty that we were intending to make some changes.

We planned to re-establish the business that Marc had in Birkenhead of antique dealing and furniture restoration, making the most of the Victorian shop front and the workshop at the side of the house.

We lifted the lino in the hall and found flagstones that had really perished. The two rooms on the right, facing The Croase, were connected by a small door so both served well for a shop but we decided to remove the partition wall and make one big shop room. So the door from the hall to the room on the front was blocked up and the floors to both rooms and the hall were relaid with a damp proof course and concrete. We also blocked off the chimney and removed the fire place



which I now think was a great shame but at the time we must have thought that the recess would be useful. These two rooms did make a wonderful shop space though.

We also replaced the little fire place in the other sitting room with a rather larger salvaged surround and re-did the floor with salvaged boards. This floor was already damp-proofed by a space below.

Over time we made other changes inside: we created a dining room from the pantry and coal store and removed the plastic roofing over the yard and built a small lean-to shed to house an oil central heating boiler. And upstairs we created a small room on the landing to act as a nursery for our first child, I think this is now a bathroom.

We replaced the corrugated iron roof of the workshop with reclaimed clay tiles and put a quatrefoil window in the top of the roadside wall. I am not sure if the door opening straight on to the road was already bricked up, but if it hadn't been then we must have done this at the same time.

When we bought The Bell there were no pavements and no front garden. You could drive right up to the front porch or to the shop door round the corner. We learned later that the space in front of the house had been a traditional site for the goose fair in the Autumn. Geese being driven from all around and sold at the cross roads. I wonder if this was also the sight of the weekly market? It would seem a logical spot.

There was a street lamp on the opposite corner by the sign posts which gave a lovely soft light into the windows on the front of the house. It was knocked into sometime after we moved and never replaced, making this a very dark corner now at night.

The garden ran straight down to the stone wall bordering the lane or footpath by Moor Farm and was the width of the house. It was a good vegetable garden with a concrete path down the middle and a wonderful cooking apple tree at the end. This tree has only recently died. The garden was bordered by a high traditional mixed hedge on the road side and iron hurdle type railings against an orchard belonging to Willow Farm along the opposite side.

The gate onto the property was a field gate next to the workshop and actually opened straight on to the road!

There was metal tethering ring fixed to the wall of the workshop and two lovely orange and black enamel advertising signs fixed higher up, a legacy from the days of the grocery business. One advertised Sprats Ovals and I am sure the other was for Lyons or Typhoo Tea. We were very sad when subsequent occupants took them down and in fact I bought them back for 50p each and we had them at the Granary for a very long time. The same owners tried to grind off the old Bell sign painted onto the brickwork on the front. They were stopped by drinkers at The Corners Inn who spotted the 'vandalism'! But it was too late and although the bell was re-painted it wasn't the same and now there is just a strange white square which I am sure people must wonder about!

The porch at the front door circa 1950 was fairly dilapidated and did nothing for the building and so we took it down, only to be chastised by our neighbours who said that it was used by people as a bus shelter. Oh dear, another gaff! We learned later the Mrs Perry used to sit in a previous porch to sell her newspapers circa. 1926 - 1937.

In the 1970s there were lots of grants available to help with home improvements. We applied for help with roof insulation and an upgrade to the bathroom. We were told we could have money towards both of these but had to replace the windows on the front with modern plain casements popular at the time. We were horrified and decided to live with the bathroom and buy the insulation ourselves! I can't imagine The Bell without it's beautifully proportioned sash windows!

(It is possible that the brick facade was added to the original timber-framed house by Kingsland's famous builder and bridge-builder John Gethin (1757 - 1831) who lived in Brick House. It is likely that it was he and his brother Benjamin who gave Rose Villa or The Villa now Westmead the same treatment. Ref: The Leon Valley. Norman Reeves)

Over time we laid a crazy paving of broken flag stones and sand stone in front of the shop entrance and built a low wall and planted a low hedge along the boundary at the front, installing a gate and path with grass and trees either side. Because we were so hectic and never really came in and out of the front door ourselves our lovely neighbour at The Croase, Ronald Tringham, used to cut the grass for us. We tried out two re-claimed porches at different times but neither felt right so did without. We did however install and leave two re-claimed balconies beneath two upstairs windows on the front.

The orchard and later the garden behind The Bell was bordered by a traditional mixed hedge and deep verge. The hedge and verge began to vanish as the orchard was developed and now the verge had been taken into the grounds of the Bell House with a high fence and, to my mind, this is greatly detrimental to the property and affects the gentle curve of the road leading from the cross roads.

There was a door in the wall to the left of the house which opened onto the covered yard. This must have been the popular way to enter the house as the vicar, Rev Herbert Thomas fell through it when he came to call. We had piled things up in the yard and never thought of using the door. However it was lovely to meet him. We did brick it up later.

Acquiring extra land

In December 1970 Mr Robert Price of The Willows Farm died and his widow Ethel put the property up for sale at auction in 1971. The Bell had no land at all along the back up to then. Four building plots had been granted along the road and the rest was in two lots, an orchard and a meadow with access to the road on the far side of the farmhouse, two further building plots had been granted on the other side of this access track. Mrs Price, was to leave The Willows and live in a new house called Little Croft, now Croft House, on the furthest of these plots. We were terribly lucky and managed to buy the four building plots and the orchard and meadow. We had to put two plots up for sale again immediately and sold them to Mr Hudson who built The Summer House and Grassmere. The plot to the right of Willow Farm was bought by Leonard Mills who built Lendore.

Owning this land made a huge difference to us. We were able to build a small extension and back door to the kitchen and at the same time we replaced the crumbling tile floor with re-claimed flag-stones. And, almost immediately, our menagerie increased from one dog to two, ponies, goats, chickens and even a pig.

At this time redundant timber framed barns and cottages were being demolished all over Herefordshire and Marc began to collect them. Drawing and numbering the timbers, dismantling them and having them delivered, usually by Dave Abberley, to the field. We also managed to collect roof tiles, windows doors, staircases etc.

As we gradually became more involved with building the antique business diminished and round about 1975 we closed the shop.

In time the workshop too was redundant and became two loose boxes for ponies and other animals!

We acquired the timber framed upper storey and roof of a small stone barn from Norton, outside Presteigne and rebuilt it as an extension with concrete blocks in place of stone. This linked up stairs to the house making another bedroom and then a hay loft. On the ground floor it made a garage, stable and tack room plus, I think, cover for the oil tank. We built granary steps on the outside with a dog kennel underneath.

in 1973 we got permission to build The New House on the third plot of land combining second hand materials with modern techniques and finding ways to meet the building regulations. The fourth plot was divided into two gardens, one for The New House and one for The Bell.

In 1976 we acquired a barn from Upper Wormhill, South of Hereford, and rebuilt this on the orchard moving into to it in 1978. This is now called The Granary. We built a barn and workshop behind and this has now been redeveloped into a separate house called Selukwe.

When we moved and sold The Bell House the land was chiefly allocated to the Granary leaving access at the side and a garden at the back for The Bell. We widened the entrance creating a splay for both the Bell and The Granary.

We had created a sunken lawn in the middle of the original Bell garden and when we acquired the extra land extended this to make a pond. We actually never managed to finish this pond but the Goslings who came after us did so and it is now a great asset for wildlife.

Since we left The Bell House there have been other changes and extensions built but I have chiefly written about the changes that we made.

What we found and what we learned:

1969 and 1970

On exploring the top floor of the workshop we came across a bolt of soft white fabric with an embossed pattern of flowers. What luck we thought and, using the electric sewing machine that I had been given for my 21st birthday a few months earlier, I set to work to make temporary curtains for the Bell windows, very simple and strung on plastic coated curtain wire bought from Goldings in West Street, Leominster; they did the job. It was only when they were all but completed that we found a box of very shiny, light weight metal furniture handles, coffin handles, and the penny dropped. Percy Edwards, who's carpentry workshop it had been, made coffins. The lovely white fabric was coffin liner! But I had put in the effort and we didn't have anything else so up they stayed until one by one I replaced them with curtains made from proper material from Doughties of Hereford or the market in Leominster and hung on 'Swish' plastic rails with plastic hooks!

Percy Edwards also used to cut boys hair in his workshop, Bryan apparently being one of his young customers, and we found several pairs of hand operated clippers on a shelf in the room at the back of the house which acted as the coal store.

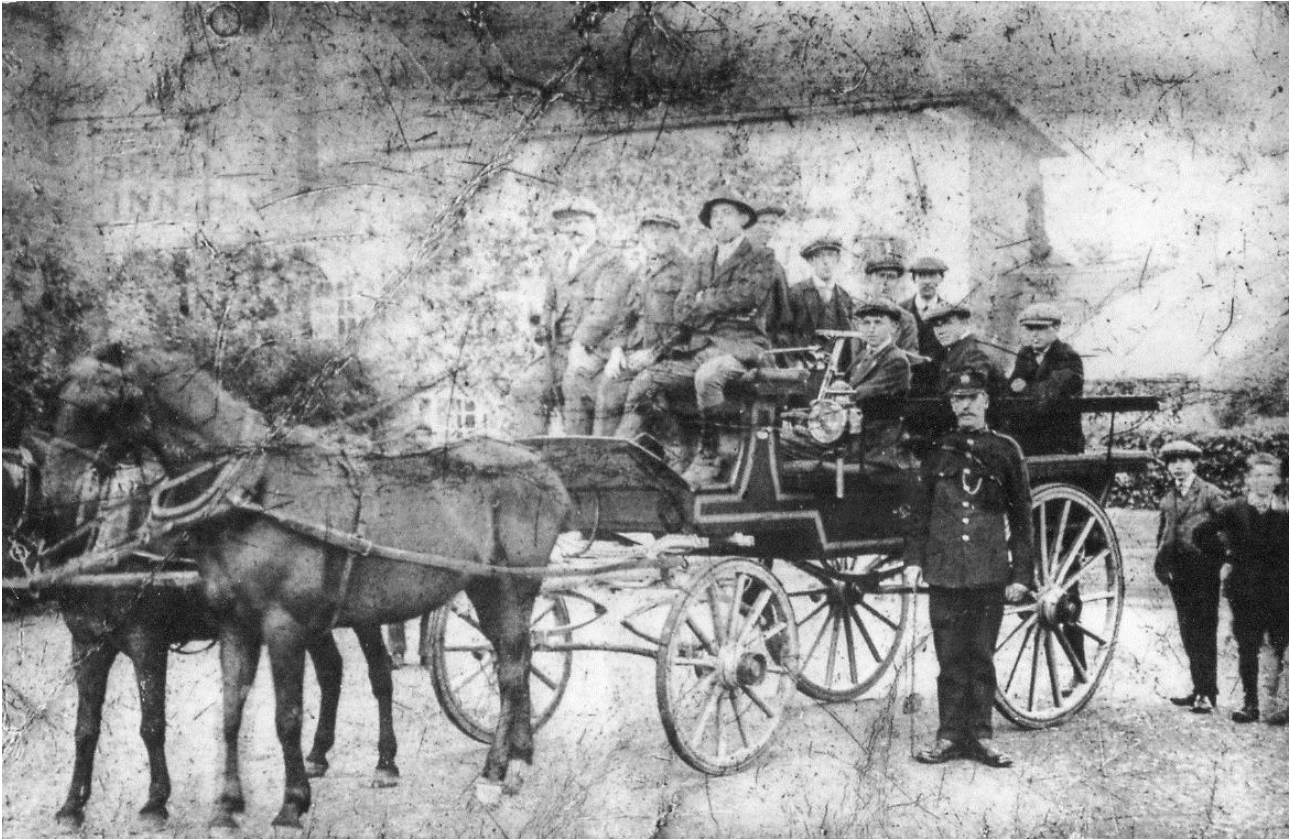
We also found Percy's name etched into a glass pane in the downstairs window to the left of the front door, this seemed impressive as I believe you need a diamond to do this. We had been told that this room had been his bedroom and indeed there was evidence of a ceiling light over the bed.

Before the Coronation Hall was built in 1953 the W.I. held their meetings in the Bell and we found a



milk jug with their emblem printed on the side.

We unblocked the bread oven in the kitchen (this fireplace, and chimney were demolished by subsequent owners) and we found a pair of patterns, a wooden bird scarer, a pair of putties and an army pay book. I am pretty sure that they were from the First World War, we kept them for ages but sadly I don't know where they are now. I wish I had investigated the name on the pay book and I do wonder, now, seeing the photograph of young men setting off to Hereford with the recruiting officer from outside the Bell sometime during the First World War, if the book and putties could have belonged to one of them? No one really talked about either war when we were growing up and it always seemed that these periods of history were best forgotten. It is different now and children study both wars at school.



We went up into the attic to lay the fibre glass insulation over the floor and we found two spikes of receipts, all covered in dust and looking like small bee hives. These were receipts for George Steven's time as a grocer in the Bell House (See dates below). They painted a wonderful picture of a general trader with invoices coming from all over the country. I remember combs (presumably made of bone) coming by train from Manchester. A regular supplier was Saxbys of Leominster. This shop still existed in the early 1970s. It was on the corner of West Street and South Street and is now part of the Talbot Hotel. Before it closed you could buy all sorts of groceries and were served from behind a deep hard wood counter behind which were shelves and drawers and beautiful numbered tins which would have contained dry goods such as flour, sugar, currants and rice. In the 70s, when these sorts of shops were closing down everywhere, these large tins were bought by antique dealers to turn into table lamps! It was clear that for many years Saxbys sent goods out to Kingsland for re-sale at The Bell. A lot of envelopes were stamped with Penny Blacks and I am ashamed to say we sold these to a stamp dealer in London! We saved and framed two advertising pamphlets and at the rest were deposited with the Record Office in Hereford. I am always meaning to visit and to look again at the dates etc.!

Saxby's Music for the Million.

SCOTS WHA HAE.



Scots wha hae wi Wallace bled, Scots wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed, Or to glorious victory.
Now's the day and now's the hour, See the front of battle lower
See approach proud Edward's power, Edward chains & slavery

Wha will be a traitor knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as he a slave?
Traitor, coward, turn and flee,
Wha for Scotland's king and law,
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or freeman fa',
Caledonia! on wi' me.

By oppression's woes and pains,
By your sons in servile chains;
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be, shall be free!
Lay the proud usurpers low,
Tyrants fall in every foe,
Liberty's in every blow,
Forward! let us do or die!

G. STEPHENS,

GROCER,

PROVISION AND FLOUR DEALER

POST OFFICE,

KINGSLAND.



At the same time we found in the attic the very tatty remains of a smart brown coat with metal buttons along with a brown paper pattern for a larger similar coat. It didn't mean anything to us at the time but later we learned about Lucton School, this being part of the uniform from 1807 for about 100 years. Many years later this jacket was conserved by Sarah Morgan, a Kingsland girl who was



studying at Camberwell College of Art.



This photograph shows The Bell in 1905. It would be lovely to think that the figure in the doorway is Sophie Stephens who would have been 51 years old at the time but we will probably never know! It is clear to see that the wall attached to the left of the house is the outer wall of another roofed building, perhaps a store of some kind. The door that we bricked up had not yet been cut into the wall. The roof looks as though it has been economically slated, using fewer slates to give a cheaper cover than on the house.

The decorative wooden porch reminds me of the porch at The Laurels and the banisters at Westmead, maybe the trademark of a Kingsland carpenter of the time?

The photo below is of Chris Lewis, on left, and others outside The Bell porch.



When re-painting the side door and bay windows which face onto North Road we stripped the old paint with a blow torch and found the shadows of lettering on the wood over the windows and door. It read 'George Stephens: Hatter - Taylor - Grocer' over the windows and 'Licensed dealer in tea coffee snuff and tobacco' over the door. We painted over these with a type of paint that hopefully would be safely removed at a later date. We had been told the shop front was re-claimed from a building in Leominster.

We were told the the little vertical slit cut into timber to the left of the bay windows was the first public letter box in the village and was where people would post their letters to be processed, presumably by George Booth and then George Stephens who was running the Post Office circa 1842.



An oil painting of The Bell by G.Sankey dated 1951. This is most likely copied from an earlier illustration or photograph, date unknown. What can be seen of the porch is very like that in the 1905 photograph. Curtesy of Val Davies.

The lettering across the front of the roof reads:

S.M.STEPHENS LICENSED TO SELL ALE PORTER AND CIDER ON THE PREMISES.

and above the shop windows possibly: GROCER...DRAPER

The painted bell and lettering Bell Inn are clearly seen on the brickwork.

The railings look like hurdles rather than fixed railings.

Some dates.

1815 George Stephens born in Weobley July 9th

1839 Married Selena Morris July 2nd. a Kingsland girl Lived in hamlet of Longford 1841 census

1842 George Booth, who was running the Post Office from The Bell (West Town) died. George Stephens took on the PO and began trading in groceries, tea and tailoring.

1851 George Stephens tailor, draper, grocer and tea dealer

1856 George Stephens, shopkeeper, tailor & beer retailer.

1858 October 1st G.S applied for his first (?) licence to sell Beer, ale, cider or perry.
or porter.

G.Stephens. Tailor and beer retailer.

1859 George Stephens. Grocer, Inn keeper and Tailor

1867 George Stephens Grocer, beer retailer, tailor and general dealer.

1868 George Stephens. Grocer and draper. Tailor. Inn keeper.

1876 George Stephens listed as beer-house keeper and taylor at The Blue Bell, Kingsland.

1880 November George died and Selena continued to run the Inn.

1885 Mrs Selena Stephens shop keeper and beer retailer.

1886 Listed as the Blue Bell Inn (Norman Reeves - The Leon Valley)

1888 Selena died aged 70, and Sophia Mary, daughter aged 33, took on the business.

1890 Sophia Mary described as a draper and grocer and offered good accommodation for commercial travellers at The Bell Inn

1891 Stephens and Broad grocers, drapers and beer retailers.
Mrs Edith Broad Grocer etc.The Bell

1895 Miss Sophie Mary Stephens Beer retailer.

1900 Miss Sophia Mary Stephens beer retailer

1902 Miss Sophia Mary Stephens Beer retailer

1909 Sophia Mary Stephens Beer retailer

1913 Sophia Mary Stephens Beer retailer

1914 Miss Sophia Mary Stephens The Bell Inn , West Town.

1917 Mrs Sophia Mary Stephens Beer retailer

1921 Sophia died in May. Aged 67

1922 Edith Broad died aged 78

1922 *Mrs Sophia Mary Stephens Beer retailer*

1926 Mrs Lillian Kate Perry Newsagent

1929 Ms Lilian Kate Perry Newsagent

1934 Mrs Lillian Kate Perry Newsagent

1937 Mrs Lillian Kate Perry Newsagent

1940 William George Stephens Broad dies aged 67 (at The Bell)

Kingsland W.I. Headquarters at The Bell House. President, Mrs Dunning: Vice Presidents Mrs Hamlen-Williams and Mrs Jobling: Treasurer Mrs C.T.Jones. Secretary Mrs Thomas: Assistant Mrs Hooper.

1941 Mrs Lillian Kate Perry Newsagent

1962 Lilian Perry died aged 83

1964 Percy Edwards died aged 66

(Another of George and Selina's eight children was Arnold (1856-1939) who lived all his life in Kingsland and ran a coal, coke, lime and manure business at the Railway Station. Later he moved to Bank Farm, Aston.)

These dates have been taken from various records

More photographs of The Bell in earlier days can be found in the Photo Gallery pages of the Kingslandlife web site.

If anyone can add to the history of The Bell I would be delighted!

Jackie Markham May 2021 with thanks to Val Davies for her input.