

CHANNEL HILL FARM



NINA RALPH

Later known as Old Channel Hill Farmhouse, this 16th century farmhouse with a 1720 extension added next to the porch, was built elsewhere and assembled in Damerham. The timbers were all dated (4 was IIII and 9 was VIII). They were burnt in the second fire of 5th April 1983.

The house was on the Earl of Radnor's estate at Longford Castle and was bought after the second world war. It went on the market again when the estate had to sell their derelict properties. A photograph was in the Times as record of what was available.

1925 G White lived there and farmed the land.

1941 Agnes and Hubert Jerrard lived there and farmed the land.

1961 Mr and Mrs Lees lived there and farmed the land.

1972 They left and it was burnt down in March 1974 after it was bought by a London estate agent. It had a tramp living there who may have caused the fire - according to the village.

1976 Nina Ralph bought it for £8000 - 3rd April 1976 - still bound by covenant of the Earl of Radnor's estate..

1977 Plans granted for restoration.

1978 I moved in to picnic at week-ends.

1979 The roof was thatched by M Hayward and Son and I moved the furniture down from Chelsea. Shearing's had restored the house. It took me until spring 1980 to restore the inside when I moved in and started re-planning the garden.

1980 The rates were £6.88 per month.

1983 A fire ball burnt the house to the ground at noon. The village came to help rescue some furniture and I gave a thank-you party to them.

1984 Council grant for £500 towards re-building and permission was given to change from thatch to tiles.

1985 Restoration was finished. A window in the 1720 loft which I found from old photos was replaced. I moved back into the house in December.

1996 I left Old Channel Hill Farmhouse, sadly due to ill health, on 13th December, hoping my conservation work would be continued and the grant accepted to save the privy and leave the old pump in situ.

I drove to Damerham at Easter 1976 when I first found a very badly burned ruin of an old thatched farmhouse while staying at Garretts Farm, Martin with the Wilkinsons. I decided to buy it the next morning and rang the estate agent and sealed the deal for £8000. I drove to London and found an agent who bought it for me within the month. Most of the building had to be replaced and it was finished in 1979 - I moved in in 1980.

The bridge was about to be replaced by a new one. The lovely Allen River runs through the village at the bottom of Little Mill Lane. I waited for the surveyor very early each morning until I finally made him agree to just

restore the bridge. I agreed to pay for the finials, four were missing and they cost £40. I said my coffee mornings would pay for them but this was not necessary.

I restored the inside of the house during five years and one door was to be put on. Then disaster! Two claps of thunder and a heavy hail storm sent a fireball which burnt the house down in April 1983.

The villagers helped to move a lot of things out of the house onto the verges and I had to start restoration again. It was finished in time for Christmas 1986.



The planners agreed that I could use old tiles on the roof. The privy had been covered in corrugated iron and I had it thatched. Audrey Lush took a photo of it before and after and The Field magazine printed them both. It was said to be one of the oldest in the county in the book on the history of "loos".

Each year I bought snowdrops in Salisbury market stolen from the woods by the gypsies, and I started planting them opposite the house and then adding them both sides up to the crossroads opposite Pound Cottage where Clara lived. She told me she covered up a Roman floor in the parlour to save having to live in the greenhouse. I had moved into my garden room after the fire and had all I wanted

as soon as the telephone was put on. I dug a trench and put in water and electricity. I divided the wall and moved the pump from the dairy outside.

From the very beginning the village made me very welcome as a Londoner; as The Field Magazine called me. Stan Woodvine and I were great friends. He lived next door at Channel Hill Farm - it had been Back Lane Farm originally, there were two farms. I loved his country stories as he leaned on the fence. It was the first time I got into the house that he came to the rescue, a nest of baby rats had fallen on my head and he took the pail.

When I drove down at weekends I usually had a fridge or a bed with me so he called me "Miss Pickford". In winter we met in the warmth of a cowshed to discuss any problem I may have had or to get a tip on how to plant the vegetables, although Marie kept their beautiful garden going.

So many lovely memories of my twenty years at the house. The bluebell woods with the peace and serenity, the vivid blues and the yellow green of the trees was a gentle beauty. I made a beautiful garden and I sat by the pump and pool and watched the birds in the walnut tree. I looked over the water meadows to the hills. It was said that Channel Hill was named after the hills that were drained by channelling the land.

We enjoyed evening walks to the river and the pretty lanes. In spring the cuckoos cuckooing was a joy to hear in spite of their behaviour, and the fun and laughter of the Easter Sunday Duck Race. The snowdrops in the churchyard, the summer show.

We all shared treasured memories with my brother and his wife as they came often from Australia, they found it so hard to return home. He became well known as he walked early mornings round the village hoping to meet Michael Jerrard who he admired for his work for the village, his beautiful garden and pool. Rick's ashes lie nearby now.

