

A letter from Hugh Ellison, 24 July 2003, of Stone House, Arthur St., Penrith illustrating the life of the church whilst his father was the Vicar.

My father, Geoffrey Walker Ellison, was Vicar of Levens from 1947 to 1953. He and my mother (Helen) moved from Sedbergh to Levens during the great snow of February/March 1947. The furniture van was the last to get over from Sedbergh to Kendal during a brief lull in the storms. When they arrived at Levens, Cog Lane, which ran up the south side of the Vicarage, was filled to the tops of the stone walls with snow. They brought with them three children of school age, the first young people to live at the Vicarage for very many years.

The Vicarage was a strange house. It comprised a row of three old cottages, to the front of which had been added six grand Victorian rooms. Hence there was a difference in levels between front and back. One of two back staircases, an old cottage staircase, led simply to a single upstairs room, which could confuse visitors. There was also, unusually for a Vicarage, a lift.

There was a large garden surrounding the house, with very substantial outbuildings. Next behind was the kitchen garden, followed by the tennis court (formerly orchard) and then a paddock. The village used the tennis court, approaching via Cog Lane. Of course all this was swept away in the 1950s. Indeed my parents were the last people to live in the old house.

My father's stipend was £300 a year. Out of this, since the Church then had no pension arrangements, he had to pay his predecessor Canon Bannerman £100; he also had to pay £50 towards dilapidations for the house.

The garden was looked after by Mr Mason. He lived up the village in the next house after the bakery.

The Vicarage had a very rural aspect, since of course there were no houses in the field opposite the front gate.

There were four shops (at least). The Strongs had the grocery/newspapers/Post Office on the corner (going right from the Vicarage). A little beyond them was the butcher, Masons, and then the bakery (all on the road towards Heaves). There was another grocery roughly opposite the Strongs. Lower down the village was a forge.

The church was partly notable for the fact that the pews were painted a most unpleasant green. My father succeeded in having the green scraped off. The service used to begin without the Vicar being present - the organist simply struck up the first hymn, and he came in during it. Fortunately I never remember my father being late, or there would have been a difficult hiatus.

One thing where my father failed was with regard to burials. Rock was very close to the surface in the churchyard. This made the digging of every grave an awful task. Father suggested blowing all the rock out with explosives, and then filling in with a good depth of earth. The PCC was horrified!

I remember once when the Christmas tree caught fire during the Christmas service. The Vicarage pew was the second on the right (the Bagots had the front one) so I rushed forward and carried this "burning bush" out into the churchyard and left it there to expire.

The bells were outside, in a sort of dip. My mother once joined the ringers to ring in the New Year. But so low down the bells that they found out afterwards that nobody had heard a thing.

Some people whom my mother especially remembers:

Two nice elderly brothers called Rothwell who lived in Lower Levens and owned a sweet factory in Warrington.

Mr Robert Bush at Beathwaite (John's father). A delightful man. He paid for my parents' first post-war continental holiday, cost £25 each all-in for a week in France.

My uncle William Ellison and Aunt Margaret who lived at Greengate House. My father's elder brother. He was one of the churchwardens (not often, I suspect, that this happens). He was one of the powers on the Westmorland County Council, chairing the Education Committee for a great number of years.

A Mrs Scorer who lived down the road to the church. The people next door to her had the first television set which my parents had ever seen - they were invited in to watch the present Queen's wedding.

Across Levens Bridge and up to the left, was High Barns Farm. One might have expected this to be in Heversham Parish, but it wasn't. My father was careful to hold on to it, since Mrs Edmondson was a superb cook - it was good to make a pastoral visit at about tea time.