

## THE STORY OF THE BUILDING OF NETHERFIELD

by Dorian Reed

c. 1931

It has frequently been in my mind during the last 2 or 3 years that it might be of some interest to future owners of this property to know how this house came to be built, why it was placed where it now stands, and who was responsible for its design and construction. With this end in view, I propose to set down as accurately as I can, a short history of its birth and growth, trusting that it may be carefully preserved even by those who take no interest in such matters for the benefit of those, who, like myself, do not regard a house simply as a roof over one's head, or even as a place to eat, sleep, and amuse oneself in, but rather as a living thing with a definite personality of its own, brought into being by those who planned and created it, and added to by those, who have lived in it, been happy in it, suffered in it, mayhap altered it, and then died in it, year after year. At any rate, speaking for myself, I know that as regards the few houses I have lived in, I would have given a great deal to have known more about their history and how and why they came to be built, so that I am determined that future owners of this house at any rate, shall know something of its history and perhaps a little, only a very little, of the life of him who built it.

It was in the summer of 1923 when I was in my fortieth year, and while I was staying at a small house at Catsfield, Twisly by name, which I had rented and furnished for the summer months, that I first made up my mind to try and find a small house (preferably an old one) with anything up to one hundred acres of land in this part of Sussex. The country all around was known to me fairly well already, as my only son, Ramon, was at a preparatory school near Hastings, and I often came to Bexhill to visit him from London during term time. It was not, however, until I lived at Twisly, that I got to know the country really well, as my search for a house involved exploring every bit of this county, which could be reached by car, accompanied always by my field glasses, which were trained on to any house well away from the road, which looked as though it might have possibilities as a residence.

I had fixed on this part of Sussex, partly because of its varied beauty, partly because I wished to be moderately near the sea, and partly because it seemed to me an ideal distance from London where my work was and where I lived at the time.

My search however was unsuccessful and I began to think I should have to try elsewhere. The idea that I should build a house had never occurred to me, as I had a passion for old houses at that time (and for that matter still have). A neighbour at Twisly, who knew I was looking for a house suggested one day that I should meet a friend of hers who would be the most likely man in the district to know of any house available in this part of Sussex. This friend was Sir Anchitel Ashburnham Clement who had lived in East Sussex all his life and his family before, was agent to the Ashburnham Estate a position he had held for 20 or 30 years and was a well known figure in the life of the county. Accordingly a meeting was arranged by my friend Mrs Battine and we met at tea at Normanshurst. He told me that unfortunately he knew of no likely place but there was an old farm house called Netherfield Place, part of the Ashburnham Estate, which might be available though arrangements would have to be made with the existing tenant.

He said further that he did not think the house could be sold without the land which would involve buying the whole estate of about 700 acres but that at any rate there would be no harm in my going to look at the place even if nothing came of it. Quite apart from the possibility of purchase, I jumped at the opportunity of seeing over an old house, so in a few days I set off for Netherfield Place. The house itself was disappointing as far as the interior was concerned, being just a comfortable Georgian farm house with no special character or beauty. The outside particularly the North front, was charming with mellowed old brickwork, lead light windows built in the shape of the letter E with the projection in the middle. The South front which was quite flush without any projections was not nearly so attractive as the windows were bad and there were not enough of them. However it had been spoilt by a horrible modern porch in the worst possible style built presumably to help keep out the wet from the front door which is exposed to the full fury of the prevailing south west wind. (This porch I have since had pulled down and the whole of the south front weather tiled down to the level of the ground floor windows, in order to keep out the wet which drove right through the brick work in stormy weather.)

Although as I have stated this farm house is Georgian there are signs inside of earlier work than this and it is obviously the site of a very much older house. T.W.Horsfield, in his history of Sussex (published in 1835) refers to the fact that the ancient manor of Redisfelle from which the present hundred namely Rotherfield derives its name, is described in Domesday under the hundred of Hailesaltede and the description ends "it has been desolated". "The next trace we have of this manor", he says, "is in Edward II which we find

Vincent Herbert, otherwise Finch, possessed of this manor and residing at Netherfield Place, which although stripped of nearly all its ancient magnificence is still in existence” There is certainly no sign now of any magnificence unless the remains of the old moat on the south side of the house can be said to merit such a term !

However, I very quickly came to the conclusion that this place would be quite useless for my purpose. To start with the house was too small and could not be added to without spoiling it. Then there was the question of the farm buildings right at the door. Either they would have to be taken into the house as it were and utilised as outbuildings and additions (the old oast house could no doubt be made into a very attractive guest house or ‘Montague’ tower) which would necessitate putting up new farm buildings elsewhere - a very costly business or, one would have to put up with cow lodgers and byres at one’s very door - an impossible state of things for a gentleman's residence !

There and then however it suddenly occurred to me why not buy the property which was beautifully situated and erect a house for myself somewhere near this farmhouse so that in the years to come, if I ever wanted to retire from my work in London, I should have, if I wanted it, a ready made home farm close at hand, to give me some sort of occupation and amusement? My health, never very robust, had been giving me increasing trouble since the death of my wife in 1921, and I was gradually coming to feel that I should not for much longer be able to stand the strain of London life. If my work (I was joint Managing Director with my brother in the firm of Albert E. Reed and Co Ltd, paper manufacturers, which my father had founded in the year 1895 or thereabouts) had been really congenial to me it would have been a very different matter, then I should never have thought of even a small estate in the country; but it never had been congenial and I felt more and more that a country life was what I needed and what I should most like. And so the more I thought about it, the more I came to like the idea of creating a house and not only a house, but a garden for myself which I could watch grow and develop as the years went by.

After all a house has got to be new at some time or other, and I rather came to like the idea of building something which though it might not look beautiful in my lifetime would, if well designed and built of good material, take on more and more beauty as the years went by, and eventually give the joy and ecstasy to future generations which old houses today give to me.

Now that I had decided seriously to consider the possibility of building a house, the next step

seemed to be to get down an architect to explore the property and at the same time to get some approximate idea before going any further of what the sort of house I had in my mind would be likely to cost. The only architect I knew personally was one Gerald Unsworth of the firm of Unsworth and Triggs. He had already stayed with me at Twisly once or twice when I was contemplating first the purchase of an old house at Borecham and then of Sir Anchitel Ashburnham Clements old family place at Broomham near Hastings, both of which I had eventually turned down. I knew nothing of Unsworth's work except that he had done some alterations and extensions to an old house belonging to my brother which he was very pleased with, and further that he had done some quite satisfactory cottage work for my firm. My brother regarded him as sound but not brilliant, and willing to take an infinity of trouble. Moreover he considered him thoroughly business like in his methods. This was the opinion I formed of him but I shall have more to say on this subject later on.

He came down and after thoroughly exploring the property together, the beauty of which grew on me more and more every time I saw it, we had many discussions as to the sort of house I should build and the amount of accommodation I should want. Ultimately he promised to go carefully into the matter and let me have a very rough estimate of what such a house would cost. The figure he gave me to include garage, electric light and drive was about £10,000,

Now came the question, was I justified in spending such a sum in addition to the figure of £9,500 which was the price asked for the property. After long and anxious thought I came to the conclusion that I was. I was a widower with only one son and as far as I could see very unlikely ever to marry again. My son was to some extent provided for under his grandfather's will so that there was no particular object in my saving. Moreover as I looked at it, the figure of £9,500 which I should have to pay for the property would be to some extent an investment. The three farms, Netherfield Place, Ivyland and Foxhole brought in a rent of £260 a year. Then there were two or three cottages and some other land let for about £40/50 a year, and this with the shooting brought the total gross rent up to about £300 a year. In my innocence and ignorance, I thought that after paying tithe and sundry other expenses I might look for at any rate a return of about 2% per annum on my outlay, and in view of the pleasure I should get in owning the land and looking after it this seemed to be quite a moderate return. Unfortunately I did not realise what a deplorable state all the buildings on the property had been allowed to get into. I had asked Sir Anchitel who was acting for the vendor (the Earl of Ashburnham) if the buildings were in good order and he had replied in the

affirmative. I am afraid his idea of good order and mine were very different but I ought of course to have had them all surveyed before buying and for this omission I have paid very dearly. What the future will bring forth I do not know but so far I have not made a penny return on my investments since I purchased the property now nearly seven years ago. In fact, I have been on the wrong side every year. However at the time I salved my conscience by looking upon the property not as an expense but as an investment, and I finally decided that I would buy it and build my house.

The contract was signed on November 18th 1923 and I took possession on the last day of that year.

Between the date in September when Unsworth gave me his approximate figure as to what the sort of house I required would cost, and the signing of the contract in November, I had of course paid many visits to the property both alone and with Unsworth, with the object of discovering the most desirable site for the house.

There were a number of essentials to be borne in mind in this very important matter, the first being aspect. The house must be so placed that it should have a view and face south or very nearly south. So many old houses to my mind are utterly spoilt at any rate to live in owing to the fact that they stand in a hollow and that all the principal rooms face the wrong way. Another most important essential was that the site should be thoroughly secluded and well away from the road as with ever increasing motor traffic any house placed near a road would become unbearable. If I built a house I wanted to make certain that as far as was humanly possible it should be a place of complete peace and rest both within and without.

A further important point was that there should be a good background for a garden. So many new houses are quite spoilt by being placed in the middle of a field with hardly a tree to keep them company. I felt that, if I could find a site with some natural boundaries and a few moderately good trees it would be a great help in getting the garden to look to some extent matured in a very short time. Flowers and some shrubs grow quickly but it is the bigger trees that take the time and that one misses so in a new garden.

There was one other essential without which all the others would be useless and that was a good and abundant supply of fresh water. East Sussex is rather a waterless district and there are many quite big houses even at the present time which suffer severely from shortage of

water in a drought and have to be careful with water in quite a normal summer. I wanted a supply which would be thoroughly adequate and would allow for plenty of baths at any time of the year, and would be sufficient for ample watering of the garden in a dry summer.

These then were the principal essentials in the site which we hoped to find. We could of course have supplied the first by placing the house somewhere up near Netherfield Down which is 500 ft. above sea level at the highest point. Here on a clear day one can see the sea not only due south but to the southwest as well, across the Pevensey marshes, a clear view of the downs can be got from Beachy Head to where they rise from the Weald of Sussex many miles inland. This however would have been terribly windswept (very much more so than the existing site), and there would have been no background for a garden. High Wood was explored as there were and are still some good beech trees there and the soil is dryer than it is on most of the other parts of the estate. Unless however the house was placed near the road the ground was too uneven and steep for the making of a garden, and to get the right aspect there would have been very little view. At length we came to the conclusion that the best spot for the house to be placed in would be right in the middle of Duckreed Wood. Although this would involve a costly business in cutting down many trees and a good many acres of under wood and in making a drive somewhat longer than we had intended, yet here we had the ideal site.

There was a considerable area of level ground here, about 350 ft above sea level, which was of a dry sandy nature with sandstone quite near the surface. The ground fell away rapidly to the south and rose gradually towards the north. This would enable me to have what I had always wanted - a house standing at the top of a southern slope. What was known as the Broad ride - a ride running right through Duckreed Wood from Poundfield at the top to Cinder field at the bottom - would form a good natural boundary on the western side, the garden on the eastern side we had two fields one of which would be very useful for taking a portion for a kitchen garden, and the other one had a most attractive pond in the N.W. corner surrounded by good trees which could at some time be made a great feature of the garden. The soil on this site, or at any rate the part of it near where the ground began to slope to the south, was beautifully dry even in wet weather (a rare thing for this district) being of a sandy nature with sandstone quite near the surface. As to the view it was impossible to tell just how good this would be at the moment as the whole site was covered with dense and dark under wood. We could tell from the lie of the country, however, that there should be a good view and when later on a slight clearing had been made and we had climbed up on to planks raised well above

the ground it was quite obvious that when sufficient trees had been cut down and the under wood cleared, not only should we have a very beautiful distant view but a good foreground view as well.

There remained only one other essential for our site and that was water. In exploring Duckreed Wood we had come across a good stream on the west side, right at the bottom of the wood which clearly indicated a good spring in the vicinity, and we knew of course of an excellent spring where the farm obtained their drinking water some distance away. Unsworth however thought it quite likely that water might be obtained much nearer the site than this, if not actually on the site itself. Every other feature being so absolutely what I wanted, I decided to settle provisionally on this spot for the house, and to call in some water experts to see exactly where and in what quantities water could be obtained.

This was done and with the help of a local well digger - Fuller by name - they informed me that they had little doubt that by digging a well not very deep we should obtain all the water we required. So by November the site was at last definitely settled, and permission was obtained from Sir Anchtel to commence clearing the under wood not only on the level ground which I have already referred to but also right down to Little Duckreed and Cinder fields which lie at the bottom of Duckreed Wood.

During all this time I had of course had many discussions with Unsworth as to the type of house that should be built. While I was still at Twisly we had spent a good deal of time in looking at old houses of one sort and another to see if there was any particular period of architecture which I wished to follow. My feeling all along had been for Queen Anne or early Georgian, not only because I think this period lends itself very much better than any other to being reproduced but because this is my favourite period of architecture, at any rate for comparatively small houses. I like the spaciousness and dignity and simplicity of these houses - earlier houses Tudor and Elizabethan with half timbered work are very beautiful in the original, but in my opinion not so comfortable to live in, unless they are very large. There was one old house named Court Lodge we paid many visits to, situated right in the middle of the Ashburnham Estate, and for a time I felt I would like to reproduce something very similar. It was built of stone on two sides and brick on two sides, but we came to the conclusion it would not be satisfactory for a modern house and there was a doubt in any case whether the right kind of stone could be quarried anywhere in the district without going to very large expense.

Eventually however I had definitely decided that I would like a house built in the Queen Anne or Georgian style and a number of rough sketch plans were submitted to me for my approval. Roughly the accommodation that I wanted was a good sized hall which could be used as a general sitting room, a dining room and a drawing room and a small room for myself so designed that a billiard room could be added afterwards without interfering with the rest of the house, or spoiling the outside elevation. Further I wanted 5 or 6 principal bedrooms, with a bathroom for myself and two or three for family and guests, and of course the necessary servants quarters both downstairs and upstairs for a house of this size.

After many interviews and discussions and the tearing up of many provisional schemes, a plan was finally approved which left a blank space on the north side of the house (which is now my library) for the billiard room which might be added later, providing a small sitting room for me next door to the dining room leading out of the staircase hall. The servants quarters consisted of a small pantry leading out of the dining room, a servants hall just opposite with a one storey addition consisting of kitchen, scullery, larder etc.

Tenders were invited in April 1924 from five or six firms of good standing and early in May the estimates were received, the lowest being that of £7,700 from Jas. Longley & Co. of Crawley in Sussex. This firm's work was known quite well by Unsworth and thought quite highly of, particularly their joinery work so that we had no hesitation in accepting their estimate. Work was to commence immediately and they undertook to complete the contract in nine months.

By this time, of course, it was necessary to fix the exact site of the house. The question was whether it should be placed a little further back than it now stands, thus cutting off the preferred view, so that the drive might be slightly shortened and that there should be more level ground on the south side of the house, thus giving a wider terrace; or whether all these advantages should be sacrificed for the benefit of getting a foreground view. Unsworth felt rather strongly about this, and after much thought I came to agree with him. I think, however, on the whole it would have been better both from the point of view of the garden and the appearance of the house on the south front, if the actual site had been fixed twenty or thirty feet further back. This however I only discovered some time after building had begun when it was too late to alter it. This of course is the nerve wracking thing about building a house. Decisions are so irrevocable.



And so the site was staked out in the spot which the house now occupies and the first brick was laid in the beginning of June 1924.

I must now go back a little in my story. As soon as we had approximately settled the site for the house, which was done several months previously, the first thing to be done before building operations could be started was to make a drive. There was of course no road of any sort at this time. A gate opened straight off the main road with the paddock in front of Ashes Lodge, and this seemed the obvious place to start the drive. I had for some time had my eye on this cottage for my head gardener, if I could come to terms with the existing tenant to give me possession, as it would save building a new cottage at any rate temporarily while building costs were so high. We did contemplate for a time making the entrance drive a little further up the road, where a rough cart track entered the field at the back of Ashes Lodge (where the road now leads to the farm) and taking it along the edge of the wood at the top of the upper paddock, but this never appealed to me very much as I did not like the idea of the entrance looking on to the back of the lodge and not the front. Eventually we settled on the first alternative, and as soon as Unsworth had set out the line of the drive, an estimate for the work was obtained from a firm by the name of Franks Harris & Co of Guildford in Surrey. Unsworth in his original figure of approximate cost had reckoned on £500 for the drive if we could use our own stone, of which there was a certain amount in the property. This however turned out to be quite unsuitable for the purpose being rather soft sandstone. The estimate instead of being £500 was about £1500 and this was almost certain to be increased when the house was finished as the estimate allowed nothing for the forecourt or for the drive to the servants entrance and garage. This figure came as rather a shock to me and was my first experience of the unreliability of architects' estimates !

However there seemed nothing to be done but to accept it hoping that savings might be made in some other directions later on. Little did I realise at this time that far from making savings, Unsworth's original approximate estimate was to be exceeded by more than double before the house was finally completed. Here perhaps I might say a further word about Unsworth. He had many good points; he took an infinity of trouble, he had good taste (up to a point), he was capable and obliging but he was Irish. He was always most anxious to please - too anxious in fact. He had an irritating habit when asked a direct question which required a Yes or No, of waiting to see what the other person's opinion was and then saying "Yes, I quite agree with you" or else deliberately lighting his pipe and saying after about five minutes with

a watery-eyed smile "Well, Reed, it's just a question" !

I was often asked by my friends when the house was being built if I was still on friendly terms with my architect, and I was always able to reply in the affirmative. I was assured, however, that it was only a question of time as people who built houses almost invariably quarrelled with their architects before the work was finished. Happily this did not happen in my case, though relations became somewhat strained at times. What his feelings were I do not know. For myself I can only say that there were times when I could have murdered him with pleasure.

Before building actually began on the house a foreman had been engaged with a number of men under him to start work on the garden. There were of course a mass of stumps to be grubbed, a number of big trees to be thrown, with the levelling which had to be done involved an enormous amount of work. As I have already stated, the ground fell away from the site very rapidly to the south which meant that the terraces and the lower lawn all had to be levelled. The ground also fell away slightly to the west so that this involved a considerable amount of levelling for the tennis lawn and rose garden. This work was carried on all through the summer of 1924 until the winter of 1925 and the cost of this alone amounted to over one thousand pounds.

The actual laying out of the garden was done by Unsworth and the work was entrusted to Charltons of Tunbridge Wells, who supplied all the plants and shrubs, laid all the lawns (from turf cut in the field close by) and made all the gravel paths and flower borders. By starting the garden before or simultaneously with the house we were able eventually to come into a new house with the garden partly made, which was what I had determined on from the start. To enter a new house is bad, but to enter it with no garden made at all, to have to wait for everything to grow after one has moved in must indeed be a dreary business. As it was, flowers were in bloom and plants and shrubs starting to grow by the spring of 1925 although the house itself was not finished until nearly twelve months after this date.

After a certain amount of delay in obtaining bricks of the right colour, work went on steadily with the house during the summer of 1925 and though getting good and efficient labour was a difficulty, the first part of the work seemed to proceed at quite a good pace.

It was not very long before I began to realise that the north side of the house was going to

look very unfinished with the space left for a billiard room, and after some discussion with Unsworth I decided to complete the house at once not with a billiard room however, but with a somewhat smaller room which would serve as a library, leaving the small room on the south side of the house which was to have been available as a sitting room for my son and his governess. We were able to plan this addition not only in such a way that I should be shut off from all possible noise in the rest of the house - a very desirable thing - but also that I should be able to get in and out of my room without going through any part of the house where visitors or callers might be. Although the room is far from perfect, being too small and not a very good shape, I have never ceased to bless Unsworth for his planning of this part of the house and to be thankful for the seclusion and tranquility which it has given me.

The cost of this addition amounted to roughly £1500, bringing the total figure for the house up to over £9,000. Now with the drive costing £1500 or over, the electric lighting plant another £500, not to mention what I had already spent on preparing for the garden, it was quite obvious that Unsworth's original approximate figure of £10,000 was going to be very greatly exceeded, but by what a very large amount I hadn't yet realised. Of course, I was responsible for some of the increased costs, as the house had been made somewhat larger than we originally contemplated, but the whole trouble was that Unsworth in his original approximate estimate made no allowance whatever for the innumerable extra items which were bound to crop up and which we were bound to have, if we wanted a 'complete' house in any sense of the term, nor had he allowed anything for the very heavy cost involved in turning dense woodlands into a garden.

He had had experience of this sort of thing before and I had not, and I have always felt that he misled me very badly over the question of cost. If he had worked out his approximate estimate for the house and drive and then told me that we must allow double that figure for the place before it was finally completed, I should have had no cause for complaint, but he never did anything of the sort.

All he did was to let me find out by degrees when the house was once started how in practically every direction the figure he first gave me was to be vastly exceeded. Perhaps in the hereafter there will be a special hell prepared for architects who have misled their clients. Even if this should be the case however I very much doubt whether Unsworth with his intense desire to please, and his habit of agreeing with everybody would be very much perturbed. I am reminded as I write of a typical incident which occurred when he was

staying with us shortly after the house was completed. Coffee had been served and we were all drinking it, when someone raised some point or asked some question about the garden. Unsworth immediately put down his coffee and went off to ponder over the question. When he returned about five minutes later we all exclaimed and apologised for the fact that his coffee was quite cold. With his never failing smile he replied 'not at all, I like cold coffee' ! I cannot help thinking that on the day of judgement if he is directed to that special place of torture to which I have just referred, there to atone for the misery and worry he has caused his clients, he will reply with his winsome smile "oh, but thank you very much, I prefer hell to heaven" !!

Building went slowly on and summer turned to autumn, and autumn to winter and though frequent visits were paid by Unsworth more often alone but sometimes with me to try to hasten things along, it was quite evident that the work would not be finished in nine months nor yet in twelve. Meantime there were of course innumerable points constantly arising and details to settle. These however hardly form part of what is practically the biography of this house.

And now in the early spring of 1925 a most important event took place which not only profoundly altered my life and had very definite effects on the internal arrangements of the house, which externally at any rate was nearly completion.

Close to my home in London at 80 Chester Square lived Mr St Loe Strachey and his wife with whom I had quite recently become acquainted. They had invited me to one of two evening parties they were giving. I hesitated for some time as to whether I should go to the first one as I was feeling rather ill at the time but as it was near I decided I would go in at any rate for half an hour or so. The first person I was introduced to by my hostess on entering the room was a Miss Sandwith. We talked together for a long time both possibly conscious of some mutual attraction but at that moment little did either of us realise that in a few short months we should become man and wife. On my side at any rate the attraction grew very rapidly, and early in May Joan Grace Sandwith agreed to link up her young life with mine. I will say no more about this matter here, except that we were married on June 12th 1925 and that I wished, how ardently I wished, that we could have met sooner so that I could have had the inestimable advantage of her help and her taste in the building of this house. And yet, who knows, but that if we had met sooner we might never have got further than the polite exchange of formal conversation.

My wife's arrival on the scene involved of course certain alterations in the house which as I have already stated was nearing completion. I had always wanted a bedroom with its own private bathroom leading directly out of it (a thing which I had never had). I had therefore planned to have my room over the dining room with windows facing south and east.

The next room, which was a small single room, was designed for my son Ramon, and then came a spare room with three windows facing south, next to it again the principal spare room facing south and west, with dressing room and bathroom leading out of it.

My room now as a matter of course became my wife's and this left the room next door for my dressing room, which was really too small for this purpose. Consequently we had to take a portion off the south spare room and this explains the archway and alcove in my room. Further, we decided to cut a door between my wife's room and mine but this had to be made rather low owing to the fact that a main flue goes up just over this door, which could not be interfered with.

For the moment no other alterations were made though when I first took my wife to see her future home on the most marvellous day in May, she was, I learnt later, rather apprehensive about the servants' quarters though she said nothing about this to me at the time. These were certainly on the small side but Unsworth insisted they were plenty large enough for the house, and the one or two people I consulted who should have known (amongst them my sisters) after looking at the plans, confirmed this opinion.

But more about this hereafter.

We were naturally most anxious to get into the house if possible by August, both before our wedding which took place on June 12th and after it we did all we could to get Unsworth to impress on the builders that this was essential and that they must if necessary take on more men to achieve this object. It was quite obvious by June however that the house would not be ready for us by the above mentioned date and we therefore decided to rent a furnished house for the summer holidays as near as possible to Netherfield so that we could be in the vicinity to hurry the builders, and to keep an eye on the work which was going on. We started by going to the house almost every day but it became so depressing to see how little progress was made that we very soon made it a rule not to go more often than every other day,

and eventually our visits were even less frequent than this. We had now reached the stage of having to decide on the provisional internal decorations (the final decorations could not be done for another year) and this in itself necessitated a good many visits trying to explain to painters the particular colours we wanted in different rooms. It was an exasperating business as these local painters seemed to have little or no idea of colours. Eventually my wife hit upon the idea of buying different coloured pieces of ribbon as patterns for the different rooms and this saved us a good deal of trouble. Our choice of colours however proved rather too great a strain for the head painter - a fat man with charm but no brains, and after throwing his eyes to heaven and saying that he had never heard of mauve walls in his life, before he finally gave up his job and departed in a huff. Eventually however we managed to get our ideas more or less carried out though we could never quite get any of the men to see the difference between a chalky white and a rich cream !

Now that the house was nearing completion it became necessary to decide on a name for it. As a matter of fact there had never been any doubt in my own mind as to what it should be called. I very much dislike the idea of naming modern houses 'Courts' or 'Manors'. It is really laying claim to a privilege to which they have no right. But 'Netherfield Place' is a pleasant and not too high sounding name and it seemed to me that this was the obvious name for our new home. The old house, the seat of the ancient manor which had hitherto been known by this name had for several generations been a simple farm house, and as the historian says had long since been stripped of all its ancient magnificence. What more natural therefore than that the new house - not magnificent it is true but certainly better fitted for the designation of 'Place' should be christened 'Netherfield Place' and that the old farm house should still bear this name with a qualifying addition and be re-christened 'Netherfield Place Farm'. This was accordingly decided upon, and met with the full approval of my wife and son.

I must now give some further details about the water supply, which I have already referred to as one of the most important features in the choosing of our site.

According to the information given us by experts, water was to be found in sufficient quantities at any point within the immediate vicinity of where the well was eventually dug. The actual spot was chosen because it enabled us to have a long line of outbuildings joined on to the garage which was again joined on to the house. The house standing as it does upon a sort of plateau (looked at from below on the top of a hill) made it very desirable that we should keep down the height and get as much length into the elevation as possible. I had

always been most anxious that the house should fit well into the landscape and from a distance I think we had secured this, as the ground rising behind it with plenty of trees gives a good background.

The plan as finally adopted, of width rather than depth, accentuated by the long line of outbuildings helped the view from the foreground and counteracted to some extent the disadvantage of leaving the house perched on the top of a hill. But to return to the well.

Digging had been started in the late summer of 1924 and when the well had been sunk to a depth of 120 ft. a stream was cut which Messrs Duke and Ockenden (the water experts) reported as giving a supply of 60 gallons per hour. This seemed an adequate supply.

Apparently water had been found several times before this depth was reached, but had been lost again which accounted for going deeper and deeper. Before the pumping plant was fixed a further test was made and Duke & Ockenden reported an inflow of 450 gallons per 24 hours which they considered a sufficient supply, and they thought that this might increase when pumping was commenced owing to the fissures being opened up by infiltration. Incidentally this never would have been an adequate supply of water for a house of this size, but I was ignorant about this matter at the time, and was satisfied with the assurances of Unsworth and the water experts. There the matter was left. The well house was built, and the pumping plant installed.

Early in September 1925 I received a letter from Unsworth to say that the result of a five days pumping test gave an average of only 240 gallons of water per day. In July apparently during a period of drought the works foreman had only been able to pump 200 gallons per day, and this five days test had been made as a result of this alarming state of affairs. The question now was what should be done. Having already spent about £300 on this well I was reluctant to throw the whole thing up and look elsewhere for water. Duke & Ockenden recommended the deepening of the well and they seemed confident that if we went down a further ten feet we should get the water we required. I was naturally a little suspicious of this in view of what had already happened, and I raised the point as to whether there would not be a risk of losing the water from the spring already supplying the well, but as they reassured me on this point I gave my consent to the well being deepened a further ten, twenty or if necessary thirty feet. This was accordingly done though of course at a greatly increased cost as the deeper they went the more expensive the work became. When they had gone down a

further thirty feet (making a total depth of 150 ft) tests were taken which showed that the well was giving approximately 500 gallons per day. Unsworth considered this sufficient and the work was therefore stopped, but in any case the local well digger refused to go on any longer as he said obnoxious gases at that depth made it impossible for him to work in the well.

By this time we were back in London again and were busy preparing to move in some time before Christmas. Frequent visits to the house were depressing to say the least of it.

The forecourt even by the end of November was in an indescribable state of confusion and the ornamental brick work over the porch which we had anxiously been waiting to see finished for months was still not done. At length however by dint of perpetual harrying, of both Unsworth and the builders, we were able to arrange to have our furniture moved in two or three days before Christmas Day.

House moving at any time is a most uncomfortable and exhausting business but to move into a new house as we did in appalling weather and in the depth of winter proved a severe trial. It was made all the worse by the fact that guests were coming for Christmas and while the furniture was actually being moved in, workmen of one sort or another were all over the house. By Christmas Eve however we had got into some sort of order and the last workman had departed. Now came the bombshell which was not only to bring discomfort to all of us but which would also give me a great deal of worry and add still further to the very heavy expense which I had already incurred. This was nothing less than the discovery by our second gardener who lived in the house, that there was only 2 ft of water in the well. The irony of the situation was that outside it rained and rained and rained, until the fields were flooded and the garden became a swamp but inside we had practically no water. Of course for the moment there was nothing whatever to be done and for the rest of our stay it simply meant making the best of it.

Baths had to be reduced to a minimum and water had to be treated almost as though it was champagne. Here was a ludicrous situation. After all these months of planning and waiting, after having built a house supposed to be fitted with every modern convenience, here we were with our five bath rooms and a house full of people and practically no water in the well

The first thing to be done when we returned to London was to call in fresh water experts, to



discover in the first place whether it was any use going further with the existing well and if not what would be the best way to set about obtaining a satisfactory supply. Our short stay had already taught me that Unsworth's figure of 500 gallons per day was quite inadequate. What one has to remember is that it is not only the water that is used but also the water that is wasted that has to be reckoned with. Moreover if this figure was going to be inadequate in the winter what would it be in the summer when we should certainly want considerable quantities for watering the garden?

We finally decided to call in Mr Mullins of the firm of J. Mullins & Sons of Bath. Not only were they water engineers on a big scale but Mr Mullins himself had a reputation second to none in the country as a diviner. With regard to the existing well, he reluctantly advised us, either to let it remain as a stand by, or to abandon it altogether and to use the pumping plant for another installation. He then proceeded to put before us a number of possible supplies, three of which he fully recommended. The supply he favoured most was the spring which has its outcrop close to Netherfield Place Farm. The yield of this spring at the date of his survey in January was 2500 gallons per day and he informed us that with a little extra expense this figure could be increased by another thousand gallons making a total of 3500 gallons per day. This was of course the supply which we had had in our minds as a possibility in the first place, but we had put it on one side, partly on account of expense and partly because the other water experts had informed us that water was to be obtained in adequate quantities on the actual site.

This mistake, for mistake it undoubtedly was, cost me the sum of £500. Who was most to blame, Unsworth or Duke & Ockenden, I scarcely know. Duke & Ockenden were the water experts it is true but Unsworth in his efforts to economise on something, after having helped to land me into an expenditure of more than double the figure we had originally contemplated, was also in my opinion very culpable. No architect it seems to me should advise and encourage his clients to gamble with an important matter like the water supply, but this in fact is what he did.

Mr Mullins' scheme was to convey the water from the spring by gravitation to a point 150 yds from the house and to erect here a tank with a holding capacity of 3000 gallons. Here would also be a pump and engine with a delivery capacity of 1000 gallons per hour which would be delivered direct into the house tanks through a 2' main which would form a junction with the present delivery pipe in the well house. His price for this scheme was

approximately £650 and in view of the fact that an analysis showed the water to be thoroughly pure and satisfactory in every way, and that the pump would be so near the house, I decided to accept it.

Mr Mullins had by this time made a great impression on me. Not only was he both capable and business like but he had charm of manner, and a distinctly forceful personality. His scheme, good as it was, did not stop here. He urged very strongly that in view of the small tanks erected in the roof of the house - they hold only 500 gallons - and further in view of possible future developments such as cottages, a house of this size should have a reservoir of at least 4/5000 gallons where water could gravitate and thus give a constant supply of water with the minimum amount of attention. This meant of course still further expense but time has shown him to be absolutely right. If we had adopted only the first part of his scheme we should have had, it is true, an excellent supply of water, but with the miserably small tanks supplied by Unsworth this would have involved sending a man down to pump not only once a day but very often twice a day. This would obviously have been an impossible situation and although it meant the final cost of this would be £1100 on top of the £500 totally lost on the well, I had no hesitation in accepting it.

We were promised it should be finished by Easter when we looked forward to coming down again for my son's holidays and this promise was faithfully kept. The scheme was, and has been ever since, a complete success. Water has never failed us even in such severe droughts as the one experienced in the summer of 1928 and I have ever since felt grateful to Mr Mullins for his sound advice and for the excellence of his work. I don't suppose anywhere in East Sussex there is another house with a better and more reliable water supply than we have got, and I shall show later on its possibilities were not yet fully developed.

By this time I had hoped the pouring out of money had come to an end and that I was going to be able to enjoy the fruit of all our labours in peace and quietness. The original figure of £10,000 which I have so often referred to had gradually increased, increased until I finally found that my house had cost me over £20,000. This sounds an incredible figure for a comparatively small house, and it would appear that I had been as much to blame as Unsworth for our original figure having been exceeded by such a very large amount. The trouble was in the first place that nothing had been allowed for outbuildings (other than the garage) or kitchen garden walls, both of which Unsworth knew all along I intended to have but having had no experience of building before I could not know how costly they would

prove to be, and he of course with his experience must have known. Then provisional sums had been allowed by Unsworth in the contract for all sorts of items and in practically every case these had been exceeded. I have already referred to the drive and the water supply so that taking all these items together it will be seen how the total cost had so greatly exceeded the figure I had originally had in my mind. I do not propose to go into further details of expenditure here. Those interested will find them in the appendix to my story and as Isaac Walton said about the cargo "much good may it do them".

My hope however if we were to live in the house with any degree of comfort could not be realised. We had not been in residence very long before friction began to arise in the servants' quarters due to the lack of space in every department and it turned out that my wife's apprehensions on this score on her first visit to the house had been only too well founded. The butler's pantry was totally inadequate as regards space and was too close to the dining room to be comfortable. The servants hall was much too cramped and the kitchen though big enough for the cook's work was a perpetual source of irritation as all the other servants had to pass through it in order to get to the back door. Upstairs things were just as bad if not worse. There was no proper housemaids pantry, the bedroom provided for a married couple was too small and further there was no spare room for a chauffeur. This was a necessity as his family lived in London - when we came for the summer or at other times of the year we had to put him up in the house. He had been lodged at my gardener's cottage during our first year, but this could only be regarded as a temporary arrangement.

We therefore decided that the servants quarters must move or else be rebuilt, and Unsworth was called in to put forward the best scheme to give us the accommodation we wanted without (if this were possible) entirely spoiling the northern elevation of the house. Owing to the garage and yard being so close to the house it was obvious that any extension would have to be made towards the north rather than towards the east, and further that rooms would have to be built over the kitchen and scullery thereby sacrificing the one storey wing which had hitherto been rather a feature of the northern elevation.

The scheme as finally adopted and which stands today although largely spoiling this elevation has the merit of giving us a good sized servants hall and ample bedroom accommodation. What had been the servants hall was now turned into a butlers pantry and the small pantry makes a good servery between kitchen and diningroom.

While we were making this big alteration and addition there were two small alterations in the house we decided to make, and which we have never regretted. The small room next door to the dining room which was first of all to be my business room, then a room for my son and his governess and finally a sitting room for my wife, had never been furnished and as my wife did not particularly want it we all felt it would be a great improvement from every point of view to throw this into the hall. This was the room we used most and although on paper the original size had seemed quite adequate when it was furnished and lived in, we found it slightly on the small side. The other alteration we decided upon was to do away with the small dressing room leading out of the principal spare room thereby making a much better room. It is only possible to find out the mistakes in a house by living in it (how well do realise this by this time), and the planning of this bed and dressing room had certainly been a bad mistake. In order to have a separate door into bed and dressing room from the outside and communication inside we had in the space of a few feet three doors all nearly touching each other. This not only involved serious risk of life and limb to our guests - perhaps not very important, but made it quite impossible to furnish the room with any degree of success.

These two alterations were comparatively inexpensive but the kitchen wing was a different matter and the total cost of these alterations ran into over £2,000. The expense was appalling but at any rate as far as the bulk of it was concerned a total necessity. We could certainly never have kept servants if the alterations to the servants quarters had not been made, and quite apart from this I found a certain gloomy satisfaction with my passion for bricks and mortar in starting to knock down the house and rebuild it as soon as it was built.

The work was to commence in January 1927 so that we were able to spend our second Christmas there before the house was given over to workmen. This Christmas at any rate we had water in abundance which was an improvement on the previous year. The builders had promised to have the house ready for us by Easter and strange to say on this occasion they kept their word. I had of course been down once or twice while the work was going on but the new wing was not in a sufficiently advanced state for me to be able to tell what it would be like when finished. When Easter came and I saw the addition for the first time in its finished state I must confess I was very disappointed. The northern elevation which I had liked so much before had been quite ruined. The addition was such a very obvious addition and quite spoilt the symmetry of this side of the house, and this forsooth because the architect literally had not known how to provide proper servants quarters in his original plan. However there it was, and the only thing to do was to try and train oneself not to look at the addition but

only at the main block of the house. Inside at any rate it was a vast improvement; the servants had plenty of room and were able to do their work without continually getting in each other's way. For months I could never look at the north side of the house without feeling that a similar addition was needed on the west side to balance this projecting wing on the east, and some 2 or 3 years later I went to the length of having plans got out for the addition. Apart from the outside appearance, the entrance with its small lobby, numerous doors leading through the clock room to my library had always been a source of irritation. Further, my room was on the small side, and gets no sun excepting in the late afternoon.

What I had in mind was to move the cloakroom / lavatory into my present room making a room measuring about 40' long by 18' or 20' wide with windows at either end, the south one for the winter when one could lie in the sun and the north one for hot days in summer. Perhaps there could be a small window facing west so that one could see the setting sun. The approach to this room would be by a long passage from the entrance lobby. The present cloakroom / lavatory and the small lobby outside my room were to be turned into a small formal hall and my room made somewhat smaller would be available as a room for my son. Next door would be a large cloakroom with doors at either end leading into the garden and forecourt, and then would come the big room I have referred to which would run right out to the dry stone wall on the east side of the rose garden.

There were however several objections to this addition to the house, the most insuperable being that of cost. Further, a larger house meant more servants which not only involved increased running costs but more trouble and anxiety for my wife. Years ago this servant question presented no difficulties, it was merely a question of choosing the most suitable applicant for the post whatever it might be. In these days however things are very different and to get a kitchen maid or an under housemaid one has to spend a fortune in advertising, and precious time in racing round the country trying to explain to fond mothers how nice it would be for their daughters to go into domestic service. A still further objection to this addition was that the dining room already too small for the house would be still more out of scale with the existing reception rooms and furthermore very considerable alterations would have had to be made to the garden. Lastly I have never quite been able to make up my mind whether the addition if made would be an improvement to the outside elevation or not, so perhaps it is just as well that lack of funds has prevented me from carrying it out. The interior when done I know we should like, but this would not compensate me for still further spoiling the external appearance of the house. And so my big room with its windows facing north and south

remains a figment of my imagination, one day perhaps to be brought into being by somebody else.

During this time and for the next year or two we had divided our time between London and the country spending the summer months and Christmas and Easter at Netherfield, and the rest of the year at our house in Chester Square. It was an ideal life in many ways (except for the inconvenience of running two houses), but the question of my health which was making it more and more difficult for me to carry on my work with any degree of satisfaction to myself or of benefit to my firm. I was more and more away through ill health and I began to think seriously that I must retire and content myself with a quiet life in the country. I carried on however as well as I could through the years 1927 and 1928, but by this time I was at the end of my tether and I decided to sell my house in London and retire definitely at the end of this year.

Early in 1928 my son Ramon had been taken very seriously ill and for many months first in London and then by the sea had been confined to a nursing home. His doctors were strongly of the opinion that it would be better for him to live in the country rather than in London while he was convalescing, but as his illness had left him temporarily paralysed from the waist downwards this in itself made living in a London house with its basement and many stairs quite impossible. I parted with my London house with many pangs of regret but in view of all the circumstances I was only doing what was inevitable and so from December 1928 Netherfield became not merely a retreat for the summer but our real home.

A few months before we had taken up our abode at Netherfield for good we decided that we would at last make a start on turning the pond at the east end of the terrace into the rock and water which we had had in our minds for several years, and which as I have already stated had played a small part in the actual choosing of our site. Hitherto this pond had formed no part of the garden but had been merely used for watering cattle in the field below. We now decided to take it into the garden by fencing and planting a beech hedge right round the eastern and southern sides, and by joining this hedge up to the iron fencing on the south side of the garden. It being a big undertaking we decided to do the northern and steepest side of the pond first. Some 40 or 50 tons of stone were used in making pockets for the rock plants, and steps down to the garden house which formed part of the scheme. This garden house was constructed to my own design to give the maximum amount of shelter from the prevailing S.W. wind, while allowing for plenty of air from whichever direction the wind did not happen

to blow. The roof and sides were thatched with Norfolk reeds by Norfolk thatchers who are the greatest experts in this particular art, and I shall be surprised if their work does not last at any rate for 50 years. We had thought that by this time building operations at any rate would have come to an end.

In giving up our London house however and coming to live at Netherfield permanently we had rather overlooked the fact that we should have to build a cottage for a chauffeur. A room in the house was all very well for temporary visits but as a permanency it was quite impossible. Up until now the place had been weak in cottages there being only Ashes Lodge which was occupied by my head gardener. This had originally been a small homestead with one or two old fashioned outbuildings where the tenant, Mr Hobday, had kept a few cows and carried on minute farming operations. When he vacated it and went to live at Foxhole Farm, I had let off the few fields around the house amounting in all to about 20 or 30 acres to another tenant of mine, always with the idea in my mind that I might at some time take them over and farm them myself. This seemed to be the moment to carry this idea into effect. The land was not getting the attention which it needed and as I was now going to be permanently in the country it would be (I hoped then) combining profit and pleasure, to have our own herd of Jersey cows, keep our own pigs and poultry, and gradually improve the land. This meant of course two new cottages instead of one, as Ashes Lodge would be wanted for the cowman but as a pair of cottages would cost slightly less in proportion to a single one, I felt this was a very business like proposition, and Unsworth was invited to prepare plans for what are now known as Beech Cottages. My scheme, of course, also involved up to date farm buildings and the altering of Ashes Lodge so that there should be a proper dairy for the making of our own butter. The work was undertaken by Hutchisons of St Leonards, and by the autumn of 1929 the cottages were finished and I had started my small farm.

The one other big undertaking I have not referred to was the grubbing in two successive winters of some 12 or 14 acres of stubs. The reader will remember that the ground on the way up the drive between the paddocks and the garden on the north side and from the edge of the garden on the south side down to Little Duckreed and Cinder fields had originally been dense under wood. This had all been cut down and I had been told that if these were kept 'brushed' every summer when the sap was up they would gradually die. This was done for several summers at considerable expense but with apparently very little result I began to think if they did die it would be such a gradual process that we should all be dead and gone before it happened. Moreover if they did die, they would still be there in the ground, an

eyesore to look at and a danger to talk on. Patience never having been of my greatest values, I decided to take the bull by the horns and to have the whole lot grubbed and burnt. This would be expensive, actually it cost £40 an acre) but once done it was done for good. The ten acres or so on the south side of the house which we had nicknamed 'Sahara' because it grew nothing but a mass of weeds, still remained an eyesore and this summer of 1930 the whole of it was hand hoed, the rubbish burnt, the ashes running into hundreds of piles, were spread on the ground and after harrowing and rolling the whole of it was sown with grass. It is bad land and will I am afraid not make good pasture but at any rate will I hope fulfil the ambition which I formed when the under wood was first cut six or seven years previously of seeing sheep and possibly cattle grazing right up to our garden gates.

Now indeed I had good cause to congratulate myself for having accepted the sound and valuable advice given to me by Mr Mullins several years previously, when he urged the construction of a reservoir with an ample storage capacity, for not only were we able to lay water on to the cottages, a luxury which no other cottages in Netherfield have got - but we were also able to supply both farm and dairy as well.

In the early spring of 1930 we were able to make still further use of our good water supply. During the drought of 1929 we had been much worried by having no proper facilities for watering the garden. The water was there, sometimes overflowing, but there was no means of conveying it where it was wanted.

The kitchen garden we were able to water to some extent from the stand pipe just outside the greenhouse, this being on the main, but except for a pipe under the ground in the sunk garden, where one could get no pressure at all, there was no possibility of watering the rest of the garden except by hand cart and watering can. To see lawns being burnt up and shrubs drooping for want of water and to know that down in the wood about 150 yards away it was running to waste was a situation that could not be borne. Mr Mullins was therefore called in again and he suggested the erection of an open air tank to hold 2000 gallons which would be filled partly from the overflow from the collecting tank and partly from the small stream at the bottom of the wood, which so far had never failed in any summer.

He further proposed a separate small engine and pump in the existing pump house which would pump the water to the various hydrants to be fixed in the garden, at the rate of 400 gallons per hour and provide the necessary pressure for watering.



The house itself has now been finished for three or four years and has gradually come to take on a more matured air, the colouring of the bricks begins to soften very slightly, creepers begin to grow on the walls, hedges and shrubs have established themselves in the garden. There had been times during the building of the house when everything looked ugly, and I realised how far short of my dreams the house would fall, and I used to return to London sick at heart wishing I had never seen or heard of Netherfield and appalled by the task I had undertaken. When men were working to the number perhaps of 30 or 40 some on levelling the garden, some on cutting down trees and under wood, some on the well, some on the drive, not to mention any number on the house itself, there was so little to show for it, it was not to be wondered at that after a tiring day standing about and trying to decide what should be done here, and what there, but I should be glad to escape from it all and return to my well ordered house in London. Even after the house was finished and we had come to live in it, there were times when I hated the place and had a longing to knock it down and begin all over again.

These times however have passed and as I write I realise that in spite of all its imperfections I love every stick and stone of the place, to have to part with it would be almost more than I could bear. I love it in winter when the wind howls, the rain descends in torrents, the ground is sodden, and all nature is asleep. Of the other seasons I can never quite make up my mind which I love best. Whether it is in spring, when the hedgerows are full of primroses and the woods carpeted with bluebells and the trees are full of every conceivable shade of green under the sun; or summer, with the trees in their full panoply of leaf, the garden full of flowers and the fields ripe for hay; or autumn when the woods are a miracle of loveliness, made so much more lovely by the fact that one knows how fleeting the beauty is and how almost any day may bring it to an end. For sheer moments of ecstasy, however, I think perhaps the palm must be given to those long summer evenings when the sun sinks to rest in a golden glow, the downs stand out clearly against the sky, the shadows lengthen on the grass, while the pheasants call to their mates, as they go to roost.

And now it only remains for time and weather to mellow still further the bricks and tiles, and for sun and rain to bring to maturity the many trees and shrubs which have been planted; so that future generations may enjoy what I have begun.

It is quite possible of course, as the result of yet another world upheaval such as we witnessed in the Great War, that the house may be reduced in a moment to a pile of bricks

and rubbish, for while half the scientists in the world seem to be devoting their lives to research for the relief of suffering and the prolongation of life, the other half seem to be devoting equal energies to inventing ever more frightful means for the wholesale destruction of the human race. Or, a more cruel fate, it may like many other houses in the past be pulled down almost brick by brick, while its long stored up secrets of love and happiness, suffering and heroism, are unloosed into space. But if it should be spared these horrors, as I pray to God it may, then I like to think of future generations living their lives here, if they still exist, enjoying the solitude which they have always craved for since the world began.

And as they sit on a summer's day in the shade under the cedar of Lebanon, now only 4 - 5' high but by then I hope a fully grown tree stretching out its branches to heaven, or as they face the terrace hand in hand by moonlight, then perhaps they may spare a thought for he who built and planted not only for his own enjoyment but for that of posterity.