**Memories of my childhood**

by Betty McDonald (née Norman)

The Move

In 1921, the entire Norman family uprooted itself from York and Poppleton to move to Park House Farm in the ancient village of Crayke. There were my grandparents, my mother and father, Arthur – a business partner, and five children ranging in age from a baby to seven years old.

On the day of the move, the men set off from Poppleton at first light, after the cows had been milked, with the cattle, pigs, poultry, horses and two wagons. The two older horses, Caroline and Fanny, pulled the wagons, which were loaded with crates of hens and pigs, and other assorted items, and Daisy, the young horse who was still unbroken, was tethered to a wagon.

Dad, Arthur and my grandfather drove the animals. My grandfather must have planned the journey, for being a surveyor he was a natural planner. The route they took went from Poppleton via Beningbrough and Overton, across the railway line and over the bridge to avoid traversing the city of York. Crossing the railway line would have required the signalman’s permission in order to get the animals over safely between the trains.

They then cut across to Skelton and Huby, shortening the journey to Crayke by about six miles. Even so it must have been twelve hours or more. They were obliged to walk at the pace of the cattle, which grazed the verges and fields as they walked, and they would have arrived at the farm in the late afternoon, ready for the evening milking. Nan must have been delighted to see them, safe at last after the marathon walk.

Nan had taken Mildred, my elder sister (or Kay, as she is now known), with her in the Gamages removal van in the morning, along with her furniture and household goods, so that she could get the house straight and a meal ready for the men when they arrived. The rest of us travelled in another removal van. Mother brought all her furniture, family heirlooms and other belongings from York a week later to lessen the confusion for us children.

I was five years old at the time and very impressionable. As we entered Daffy Lane on the way to the farm, the enchantment grew. As soon as the vehicles stopped and the children were let loose, we dashed back up the shady, rutted lane to a great, ancient oak tree and gathered the scattered acorns for the pigs.

It was a beautiful, warm, golden autumn day in October and the leaves were thick on the ground. As we shuffled through them, the exotic scent of the earth wafted up, enthralling a little ‘townie’ like me. The smell filled my soul with a sense of freedom and exhileration. It entered my consciousness and became part of me and I have never forgotten it, despite all my journeys to far-flung lands.

The farm.

Park House Farm was one of the oldest houses in the village. It had been converted from two cottages, for much later another door was discovered at the front, and at one time it had a thatched roof. It must have been built in the 16th century and belonged to yeomen farmers, not to the lord of the manor as all the other farms did, except for Woodhouse Farm down the lane from us.

It had some very ancient vibrations, which I picked up as a child, being very psychic, and these gave me terrible nightmares that lasted for years. I slept with my head under the covers in fear of a clammy hand touching my face while I was asleep.

Mildred shared a bed with me and we slept in the tefall, which was a long, narrow room with a sloping roof. In the past, the tefall had been used to accommodate farm workers and there was a trap door at one end with a ladder down to the dairy below so that they didn’t have to go through the main house. There was another tefall at the other end of the room, full of old furniture. As it had no door, at night when it was very dark, I imagined that all kinds of unspeakable things were waiting in there to get me. We had a candle to light us to bed and when this was blown out I was terrified.

There was no electricity or water laid on to the house and we used to carry water from the pump in the cobbled yard. It was pure and clear and the spring never ran dry. There was another spring with a well in the fold yard for the livestock. There were also large water butts beside the house to catch the rainwater from the roof, which was soft and beautiful for washing. The washhouse was next door, with two coppers, one for cooking pig potatoes and the other for boiling the clothes.

We had a zinc bath that was used on bath nights once a week in front of the fire, youngest first then one after the other until we got older. All the water had to be carried in and heated on the fire or in the range in the kitchen. Paraffin lamps provided the lighting in the house, and the men used lanterns when they went outside to attend to the animals on dark nights. These lamps were lovely. They had ornate pedestals, coloured glass bowls to contain the paraffin and a glass globe to protect the flame – they would be valuable antiques now! The lamps had to be filled and the wicks trimmed every morning, and they gave a soft, clear light that made the rooms very cosy. Nan always used to keep a lighted candle in the dairy window at night that could be seen from the village. It was like a lighthouse to the weary sailor, and a beacon to guide us home when there was no moon.

The family