



BRAMHAM House  
CHILDREN'S HOME

1969 - 70

Mr & Mrs Hale, Phil Barber,  
Ann & Dave Wilkinson



The Hales & the Drury family



and the Blaker family

Play outside the  
front door.





Aunties Linda & Carol,  
Christine Colham, Jean Hockley  
Melvyn Atack.



Minibus donated by Post-grad  
Round Table.



Mrs Hale, Aunt Janet  
Stephen & Sarah Smith

The  
Humble  
family



The  
Dewey  
family



## **POTTED HISTORY OF BRAMHAM HOUSE 1968 - 1974**

Bramham House was purchased by the West Riding County Council Children's Department in approximately 1947, in anticipation of the implementation of the 1948 Children's and Young Persons Act. The Home was quite a show piece for the Department. The initial intention was for it to become a family group home to accommodate neglected and homeless children - children from broken homes and experiencing 'family problems and educational problems' and those who had failed to respond to treatment for non-school attendance within the community.

We took responsibility for the day to day running of the Home in 1968. I was a qualified Probation Officer, more recently working as a Fieldwork Child Care Officer/Social Worker. There were 37 children of both sexes and of school age, this was reduced to 35 about 1970. Included in these numbers were one family of six children, two families of five children and two families of four children. the other numbers were families of 2 and 3 children.

We had quite adequate staff, Superintendent, Matron (Myself and Mr Hale), 5 residential house parents, 3 non residential house parents, daily domestic staff consisting of cook, seamstress, gardener and 4 cleaning ladies, together with a lady to iron, many of the domestic staff were Bramham residents.

There are several children who stand out in my memories of the Home, a brother and sister aged 9 and 10, who's mother was serving a prison sentence at Askham Grange Women's Prison. the family lived in London and the children were transferred from a Home down there to Bramham in order to facilitate visits to their mother, there was no father, or indeed any other relatives in contact, this situation was repeated some 2 years later, after the children left Bramham, they had apparently asked to return to Bramham House for the second period of their mother's imprisonment.

One bright, but impoverished 14 year old girl, an only child of elderly parents, had not attended school for quite some time and flatly refused to do so, she was made the subject of a Child Care Order, she was always a quiet thoughtful girl but she settled down both in the Home and in school and she did extremely well educationally. The children's homework was supervised and each child had a job, something quite small to complete each evening, before 'doing their own thing'.

We only had one orphan during our time there, she was about 12 years of age, her mother with whom she lived just outside London had recently died, on the day of the funeral she met an Aunt and Uncle for the first time, she was brought back to their home in Yorkshire to live with them, this couple ran their own business and the girl could not settle, they could not cope with her and she was admitted to care and to Bramham House. It was a very unhappy and traumatic time for her, she

eventually came to terms, responding to understanding and kindness. The authorities later found her a foster home in the part of London where she had been brought up, she is still in touch with us.

When we took over responsibility for the Home, we found apathy amongst the residential staff and the children lacking stimulation. Our priority was to raise the morale of the Home. As a result of a previous acquaintance, the Pontefract Round table became interested in the Home and raised funds and bought an 8 seater mini bus for the Home's use. We were able to take groups of children to the swimming baths etc. This mini bus was the first gift of its kind to be offered to any West Riding Establishment. The Local Round Table showed us interest, the Wetherby Lions were also very generous, arranging day trips and outings for the children, providing playground equipment, swings slides and climbing frames etc., and erecting them in the grounds. Each year they provided a Christmas party in the Home with present and a visit from Santa Claus together with a trip to the pantomime. Another Christmas treat was an invitation for the children to attend the Bowcliffe Hall Carol Service, where again Santa Claus and a present was received.

The children were taken to Bramham Church, some joined the choir two of the boys became servers, some were eventually prepared for confirmation by the Reverend Derek Shaw, one of the family of four had to be baptized before this could be achieved. Father Shaw became part of life at Bramham House, he showed great interest and spent every Tuesday evening with the children there. A few of the children joined the Brownies, Guides, Cubs and Scouts.

Another acquaintance, a dancing school owner, from Castleford, voluntarily provided dancing once a week in the Home, this was received with enthusiasm by both the girls and the boys, some had more aptitude than others and were entered for, and passed professional exams set by the International Dancing Teacher's Association and received medals for their skills. We held a craft fayre and jumble sales to raise money to buy dresses and dance shoes, although quite a lot of these were donated by pupils at the Castleford Dance School.

Apart from Christmas, the highlight of the year was the 2 weeks annual holiday taken at Blackpool, we invariably had good weather, so most of the day could be spent on the beach, playing cricket etc., sunbathing or swimming. The more able children would enter the talent contest on the pier. A couple of 10 year old girls won their heat and appeared in the final, but unfortunately were unplaced.

This was the situation and routine; we all lived in a happy and congenial atmosphere until Local Government re-organisation in 1974. This meant that Bramham House became under the jurisdiction of Leeds Social Services, a radical change took place, the whole concept of the House changed, the family atmosphere was slowly eroded, when we were requested to accommodate

'delinquents' on remand from the Courts, this caused dismay and disruption to the children who regarded Bramham House as their home for so long. The attitude of these temporary residents to both the staff and to the children was of great concern and totally unacceptable, as was the unhealthy interest shown by the more 'impressionable' children.

We left our post at Bramham House at the end of 1974. We had enjoyed our time there and had achieved what we set out to do, to create a happy and caring environment for these children, who through no fault of their own, were unable to live a normal family life.

Bramham House closed approximately in the early eighties. This once beautiful house, a happy home that once echoed with the sounds of laughter and children, now stands derelict, uncared for and steadily deteriorating, since it was vacated, the gardens neglected and unkempt. It is painful to witness this disgraceful vandalism, why wasn't it put to some good use?. Bramham House did not deserve this ignominy. When Bramham House closed all the children were transferred to Ainsty Lodge Children's Home Wetherby. This Home closed a few years later and was demolished.

Mr & Mrs E Hale - March 2000



In Leeds' care : Summer 2000

## FOOTNOTE:

The private gardens at the front of the house were maintained by a full time gardener, the rest of the grounds were regularly maintained by the West Riding Authority.

Bramham House itself, was a beautiful building, all the rooms retained the original fixtures and fittings. All the doors in the house were solid mahogany with heavy brass fittings. Everyone connected with Bramham House during our time there, took a great pride in it. The children took a great pride in their home, especially their lockers and bed space, they each had a small job to do each evening, the favourite job was buffing the floor of the hall, the floor had been polished earlier in the day by the cleaners, but 'woe betide' anyone who put a foot on the floor whilst it was being buffed. The hall was a large impressive one, the main feature was the wide sweeping ornamental staircase.

All the rooms of the house were impressive:

*The Oak Room* - formerly the billiard room now used as a 7 bed dormitory had oak panelled walls a large stone fireplace with a dog grate, heavy mahogany polished door with heavy brass fittings.

*The Rose Room* - a beautiful room with a large stained glass domed ceiling, with the same doors as the Oak room, now used as a 5 bed dormitory.

The children's dining room was previously the ballroom at the end of the room was a black cast iron fireplace with Dresden tiles decorating the inside of the fireplace. The floor was a 'sprung' wooden floor used for dancing when it was the ballroom.

The playroom had an original Adam's fireplace. *Formerly the library.*

Although I have **single**d out these rooms, the whole house **was** impressive. the original 'dumb waiter' (lift) to the kitchen was still in use.

There was a small room off the hall, underneath the stairs, used as a telephone room. There appeared to be a trap door in the centre of the floor which according to the information we had, covered a deep well beneath the floor under the house.