



A history of hospitality

A Harlaxton couple ensure their beautiful home is always welcoming to guests, just as it was in its days as a rectory

Words: Mary Walsham

Photographs: John Whitaker

Opposite page from top: The hall and landing

The Grange, Harlaxton

Below: Janet and John Hindmarch with their dogs



In the far south-west of our county lies the beautiful village of Harlaxton. Very close to the arterial way of Ermine Street, which (locally) became The Great North Road, the village has historically been the site of beautiful buildings, made from the local ironstone. It has also many connections with royalty, including John O'Gaunt, who reputedly used the Manor House of the fourteenth century as his hunting lodge.

Harlaxton, which is three miles west of Grantham, must be one of the prettiest places in Lincolnshire. In fact, with its mellow stone walls, distinctive chimneys, duck pond and backcloth of the Lincoln Cliff, it must also be one of the most appealing villages in England – and it has a very interesting history, too.

We know the Romans settled here, as an urn containing bones and coins was discovered in 1740 near the old moated Manor House. The old Manor House was certainly very old, as it was in existence in the fourteenth century. Remains of the moat can still be seen in the gardens in Rectory Lane and the Elizabethan archway to the Manor House is also still in existence. A man ploughing a Harlaxton field made another exciting find in the early part of the sixteenth century. A brass pot containing a golden helmet covered in precious stones was unearthed, which was thought to have belonged to John O'Gaunt.

The manor of Harlaxton had many owners, but stability came when it was bought in 1619 by Daniel de Ligne, later Sir Daniel, a Flemish refugee from religious persecution. George de Ligne Gregory, an eighteenth century descendant of the family, had a considerable influence on the village. He took what were basically wattle and daub dwellings and clad them with dark red brick. If you look carefully as you walk around Harlaxton you will see the initials GDG on the houses, along with dates, such as 1819 and 1796. He was especially busy in the years between 1790 and 1820. He obviously believed that the working man

deserved a pleasant place to live in rather than a rough dwelling.

He was succeeded, in 1822, by Gregory Gregory, who had been living at Hunger-ton Hall in Wyville, not far from Harlaxton, where he had a large architectural library and many works of art. Though of the landed gentry, it is said that his interests were not those of a traditional landowner but more those of a collector. This obviously influenced his decision to pull down the old Manor House, which was dilapidated, and build his vast new 'palace' in its stead. In the 1830s, this wealthy landowner commissioned the architect Anthony Salvin, who had restored, among other buildings, the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace and Caernarvon Castle to build a new Harlaxton Manor. The first part was completed in 1837 to sumptuous celebrations, and Gregory then changed the architect to William Burn, who continued the project to its completion in 1855. Sad to say, Gregory Gregory died a year before the new Manor was completed, so although he lived in the house for three years, never saw his grand design come to fruition.

This new Manor House is a pioneering fusion of Elizabethan and Baroque styles, and known as the 'wildest and most fanciful mansion of the 1830s', and nothing can be more spectacular than its unbelievable silhouette.

Gradually, in mid-Victorian times, the centre of influence in Harlaxton moved away from the Manor House to the Church, possibly because the new house had been built a distance away from the main village, and when the old absentee vicar was replaced by a rector with more enthusiasm, the church began to be at the hub of things.

A new Rectory was built in 1869 for Canon Garfit. He and his wife were not only interested in the spiritual welfare of their parishioners but in their education as well. Mrs. Garfit held sewing classes and the Rector held 'Penny Readings' in the schoolroom. They were noted for their hospitality and entertained the

bellringers and choir members to supper at the Rectory. Mrs. Garfit's milk pudding was, apparently, famous in the district!

John Hindmarch, who has a great enthusiasm for Lincolnshire history, and his wife, Janet, chose to make their home in this particular historic village in 1979. It can easily be seen why they wanted to live in 'The Grange' because 'The Grange' had been the 'new Rectory' before it ceased to be connected with the church, and was renamed. When Janet had been in the house for a short time and was exploring the stables she came across a plaque with 'Wellington House' engraved on it, so the house has had three different names in its life.

They also had another link with the house in that their sister-in-law is a daughter of the late Canon Robertson, the Rector of Harlaxton for twenty-four years until 1972. The location of the village attracted Janet because of its proximity to her native Grantham, where her father ran the well-known Chandler's Oil and Gas Company.

'The Grange' is situated, appropriately enough, in Rectory Lane, and as one enters the grounds through the gates with pillars surmounted by eagles, one can see the sweep of the drive, up to the house, and get the first view of the gardens.

It comes as no surprise to learn that John Hindmarch, though a senior partner in the Chartered Accountants Duncan & Toplis, based in Lincolnshire,

actually comes from a horticultural background. He originates from Nottingham where his family were established nurserymen. This inherited trait shows in the flair for design and planning at 'The Grange' and in John's obvious knowledge of plants and where to grow them. Twenty-six years ago, when they moved into 'The Grange', the garden was basically lawn with trees and stables near the house. Now, many different features distinguish the garden. Amongst the trees in the garden that has survived, however, is one that is particularly striking – when the Duke of Wellington died in 1852, many trees of the genus sequoia Wellingtonia were planted in those gardens which were large enough to accommodate them, because 'it was a giant of a tree for a giant of a man'. There are quite a few of these trees remaining in Lincolnshire, many of them with very soft bark on the tree trunk.

The garden has been planned with a great deal of thought and care, in that the more formal areas are nearer the house, whereas the informal parts sweep away towards the lane. Two conservatories have been added to the old stable block, one is used for sitting in, as an extra lounge in the summer months and the larger elegant structure is used for plants, which can't survive the winter. It also houses a flourishing 'Black Hamburg' grapevine from which John makes his own wine.

Going clockwise from the stables you





HOMES & GARDENS

arrive first at a courtyard and relaxing area. This courtyard is paved with York stone, which replaced the old grassed area under the trees – as John says, this is a much better ground cover here, as grass tends to die when planted under trees. The focal point in this section of the garden is the statuary at its centre.

The vegetable garden was at its mouth-watering best when I visited in early June. There were courgettes, potatoes, lettuces and beans of all varieties, to name but some of the crops. The hedge, which surrounds this part of the garden is a yew hedge, which has the glorious red buds of *Tropaeolum Speciosum*, intermingled with its greenery. Yew hedges are easily controlled and don't make too much work for the gardener over the years.

It is near to the vegetable garden where John keeps his poultry. These are hybrid chickens, bred for laying eggs and Partridge Wyandotte chickens – pretty, friendly and which bring the garden to life. There are also some cockerels, which remind the residents of Harlaxton and the nearby area that it is still rural.

On fine days throughout the year, John and Janet, friends and family, sit out on the stone balustraded terrace and look down on to the wonderful vista that is the lower part of the garden and drive. A nice touch is the trampoline, used by the Hindmarch grandchildren, two of whom live nearby.

John's favourite shrub is the *Carpenteria Californica*, an ever-green shrub with yellow centred white flowers, but you will also find another of his favourites, varicoloured specie foxgloves, growing under the trees. Where it was once mainly conifers, there are now deciduous trees to provide a backdrop for the ever-green shrubs. This structure of the garden ensures that there is always something of interest, even in winter, whilst anybody lucky enough to visit 'The Grange' in early May, when the gardens were opened in aid of the Red Cross, could not fail to have been struck by the beautiful display of tulips in the flower beds at the front of the house. These give way to a colourful display of impatiens (*Busy Lizzies*) in the summer months and Phil, the gardener, was very busy altering this display when I visited.

Just as the garden shows John's flair for design, the house illustrates just what Janet and John, with the help of interior designer, Barbara King, can achieve indoors. (Barbara was also responsible for much of the décor at ancient 'Angel and Royal' hotel in Grantham.) Their subtlety and taste shows in every part of the decoration of what was, the old Rectory. The Hindmarches are not fans of 'minimalist' decoration and manage to combine traditional styles with elegance. Very few structural alterations were needed, but a lean-to conservatory has been added to the side of the house and you can enter the kitchen through this. At the moment, the kitchen is white and 'wine', with corner cupboards and a most unusual floral "grille" disguising the fluorescent lighting. As with most stone-built houses, the outside walls of 'The Grange' were so thick that it was possible for Janet to

have a microwave built into them – next to her prized black Aga, of course!

The predominant colours in the dining room, sitting room and hall are yellow, gold and white. A new ceiling did have to be inserted in the dining room and the Victorian fireplace was replaced with one in a Florentine style. John and Janet had a round table of mahogany especially made for the dining room. As Janet says: "A round table is much more conducive to a relaxed and friendly atmosphere." There are lovely Regency style niches in the wall and attractive doors lead through into the sitting room. When these are opened the two rooms convert into one vast room. The decorative coving is very much in keeping with the style. On the right hand wall of the sitting room and covering nearly all of it, is a large English mirror which dates from 1860, which John and Janet discovered in an antique shop.

The 'Pine Room' is one room which is not gold and white, as might be expected, all the wood used in this room is dark pine. This room also doubles as a library, and houses some of John's collection of history books. On the left hand wall, standing out against the background are photographs of the extended Hindmarch family.

All the downstairs rooms have that feature of many spacious mid-Victorian homes – shutters that either fold away into the walls or disappear into the window ledge. These must have been a real boon in the days of ill-fitting windows and before central heating.

The stairs and wide landing continue the gold, yellow and white theme which can be seen in other parts of the house and the vast skylight ensures that the hall is brightly lit at all times.

There are five bedrooms at 'The Grange'. Words alone cannot do justice to their attractive décor so you have to look at the photographs to bring out their full appeal. The guest bedroom, with its en-suite facilities is decorated in turquoise, cream and gold. Janet discovered some chairs in an antique shop which were basically these colours and, with Barbara King's help, the bedspread, blinds and hangings have all been chosen to blend together. I particularly liked the hangings over the bed, which give it the appearance of a tester or four-poster bed. This type of bed-head recurs in other bedrooms in the house. The main bedroom, for instance has a yellow bed-head, and it is in this room that you will find a small, Victorian table, which is ideally suited to the age of the house. A further bedroom uses pink and green for an alluring effect.

John's dressing room was originally the bedroom of the Hindmarch sons. This has now been decorated in the strong colours of cream, terracotta and brown, which are John's choices, with the adjoining bathroom in a similar colour scheme. There used to be a space above the wardrobes when the boys had it as their bedroom, but this has now been filled in to make the wardrobes into one smart entity.

The kitchen



One of the guest bedrooms



The sitting room



Next door to the dressing room and bathroom is another bathroom. At one time a stairway led into this bathroom from above. So, a giant mirror has been put in by the Hindmarches to disguise this access point. This mirror was from the George Hotel in Grantham, the bath was from Castlegate, also in Grantham - so it can be seen that by preserving them in 'The Grange' they are preserving part of Grantham's history.

Though not attached to the house, the coach house is also of historical interest. It is of wattle and daub construction, which is of interest, as many of the village houses were so constructed. So where the coaches once waited to take the Rector around his parish, there is now an outside room, which is still used by John and Janet for entertaining. Just over twenty years ago, when they did the conversion they had a very hard job painting between the roof beams and, as Janet says, they amassed a collection of hundreds of old nails which were firmly fixed into the woodwork. A fireplace and an old feeding trough are now features of this room. The stables are next door, with the old hayloft up above, reinforcing the fact that 'The Grange' is really a country residence. The stable is also the home of a

Labrador, who accompanied me on my tour of the house, and three terriers. This 'pack' helps to maintain a lively environment and Janet, who enjoys walking them, is familiar sight in the village, handling the four dogs.

Although they live near the centre of the village, slightly away from Harlaxton Manor, this does not mean that John and Janet Hindmarch have no connection with the Manor House. Harlaxton Manor, as many people will know, is presently owned by the University of Evansville, of Indiana in the U.S.A. The residents of Harlaxton have made the American students very welcome, and towards the end of this year, the Hindmarches paid a reciprocal visit to their American friends. In fact, they do have another link with America, as one of their sons, David, the managing director of Chandlers Oil & Gas, ran in the New York Marathon for the second time in November.

So, as can be seen, this family is continuing the history of hospitality, which started, with the building of the 'new' Rectory. It certainly is the loveliest house to be welcomed into and with its attractive setting, it was a wonderful visit for me.

The master bedroom



Formal planting close to the house

