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## Temple Bank

by Lesley Dawson

Mill owners liked to show their wealth by building large houses but many of them were considered by their descendants to be too large and difficult to heat. For this reason, they were often given away to the City Fathers for use by various civic groups.

We were fortunate enough to work in such a beautiful old Victorian mansion up the road from the Bradford Royal Infirmary. Downstairs we had classrooms, staff room, office, principal's office and kitchen. Across the courtyard, at what had probably been the stables, were another classroom and student changing rooms with a staircase leading to the student common room and "new" gymnasium where students learnt practical skills in group rehabilitation and after hours we all played badminton.

I was never entirely happy walking through the gloomy front hall with its heavy wooden doors and the staircase winding up to the hospital flats on the upper floor. This entrance obviously impressed potential students and their parents when they came for interview and waited there seated in a row but was not such a joy to those of us who worked there.

Today was different. I had come back to see the old building before it was sold off. The college was moving across town to a more suitable building. I did not move from the dark wood-panelled hall for a long time thinking of all the feet that had tiptoed or clattered across this wooden floor, when they were creeping into class late or waiting in trepidation outside the Principal's office to find out if they had passed or failed an exam.

In my imagination I saw hundreds of different faces, bright-eyed teens and early twenties, most of whom went on to carve out careers for themselves in their chosen profession. Some even became important people in the countries from which they had come to study.

I shivered as I remembered those who had exited that room of such power, where so many tears had flowed as students were told they had failed and had to leave the course. How many times had I intercepted these kids and mopped up their tears in the kitchen with a pot full of tea to hand and a box full of tissues.

I began my ascent to the floor above, forbidden to staff and students in olden days, now open for all to see. I knew that the bathrooms had not been modernized since Victorian times and that the over bath showers were huge pieces of gleaming silver-coloured pipes and wondered again if my doctor friends had viewed them with pleasure or disdain. However I did remember that the showers worked extremely well on the few occasions I had “borrowed” one to shower after work, before going out to a party.

As I looked around this room with its darkened walls and ceiling I thought about the other dark secrets it probably also hid. How many mill overseers had come to the annual party provided by their bosses to keep the lower orders happy in their tedious, exhausting work. Of course, the mill workers would not have come this way, they would have been instructed to go through the courtyard to the back kitchen for tea and buns, and only selected, approved workers, at that.

How many sons had walked through here to their father’s study to be reprimanded for their gambling debts or to be told that they had obtained a commission in the army and were heading off to foreign parts within weeks? How many daughters crossed this floor to be told that father had arranged an advantageous marriage for them, to some poor rich, ninny who they had only seen once when they were both fifteen? Ah, such memories, not just for me, but trapped in the wooden panels for eternity.

If rooms could speak, what stories they would tell.