



The Old Bank House

Angela Thirkell

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The Old Bank House, first published in 1949 and long unavailable, welcomes us back into the author's world of comfortable community and generous, probing humor. The Old Bank House is a large and beautiful dwelling belonging to Miss Sowerby, the last of a long Barsetshire line, whose age and dwindling resources are unequal to the task of maintaining such a demanding manse. Having overcome her leanness about the pedigree of Mr. Sam Adams, Miss Sowerby agrees to sell the family home to the ironmaster, now Member of Parliament, whose social ascendancy has been traced in earlier installments of Thirkell's modern Barsetshire chronicles. But upon learning that Mr. Adams will be living in the house alone once his daughter marries, she warns, "There's only one thing I must tell you about the house, Mr. Adams...It likes a mistress." With the stage thus set, Thirkell commences to choreograph another delightful round of romantic infatuations and cross-purposes before bringing several dancers to rest in the happy poses of a wedding.

The Old Bank House Details

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Author : Angela Thirkell

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From Reader Review The Old Bank House for online ebook

LDuchess says

I DO own a copy of this book--but not the one pictured (and system won't let me mark it as owned--who knows why). Mine is the 1949 first American edition, a Borzoi Book from Alfred A. Knopf. Grey cloth cover, pretty good condition.

Sam Adams buys old Miss Sowerby's house in Edgewood. Gatherings of many of my favorite people!

Jocelyn says

The usual Angela Thirkell plot. She introduces several unattached people; they fall in love; sometimes they fall in love with the right person; there is some sort of misunderstanding; in the end two or possibly four of the right people wind up together. In the next book they will be having babies. Also, sometimes someone dies. It's all about life and death in the county; social change; the decline of an older generation and the rise of a new one.

In The Old Bank House, the older generation passes in the form of Miss Sowerby who sells her house and moves away to spend the rest of her days with her widowed sister. We also bid a sad farewell to the grand dame of an old Barsetshire family. But the young Fosters are growing up, the young Leslie and Grahams are making their way, and Sam Adams the ironmonger has found his place in the social circle of the landed gentry.

Sep says

If you think war was hard on the mythical county of Barcester, you should see peace. Mr. Adams who has been gradually transforming into someone the county will acknowledge (though not quite) buys the old Bank House in hopes of settling down in the country. Meanwhile a score of other characters from previous books are all worried about life's problems: aging parents, career choices, romance, or receiving ones army papers. The rest of the characters are parents of the afore mentioned and are even more worried. Rationing is still around though beginning to lighten a little. (Drape material but not the fabric light enough to make a dress.) A humors and gentle look at England in the mid-century.

Polly says

Good, but a little more drawn out than perhaps it needed to be, and this edition is the worst example of the demise of proof reading that I have ever seen. There are at least 30 errors that are obviously the result of someone being careless with spellcheck.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.4* of five

I have finally figured it out: The pleasure of reading these books comes from the same orderly place that the pleasure of studying genealogical tables comes from. If you're into it, this kind of book, with its large cast of characters that you meet here, the large cast of characters you've met before in other circumstances, and the passing mentions of familiar names, will wrap you up in a tea-cosy and feed you clotted cream on scones in front of a warm fire.

Still, in this entry into the *Chronicles of Barsetshire*, the characters one meets again are interesting but not A list, and a lot of the new people aren't that fascinating. Laura Morland, the authoress's alter ego in these books, appears, and that's always fun. But overall, this book would most certainly not be the first one a newbie should pick up. It's a fill-in and comfort read for us old hands.

No recommendations, no avoid notices, just a small sigh of contentment at having discovered a new book in an old, well-loved series.

Leslie says

This entry in the Barsetshire series reminded me of some of the earlier books in its style and wit - much more light-hearted than the previous few. A charming tale of the lives, particularly the love lives, of the county and not quite county. Thirkell makes all the nuances of the different classes of English society come to life for me (an American) in a way that few other authors have. Austen, for example, wrote almost exclusively of the gentry. Thirkell's books focus on the gentry but also included the "foreigners" who moved into the county in the 1920s and 30s, and who are very nice but not county, as well as the "self-made" men and their families.

Caro says

It had been a long, long time since I had read this one, and it's a goodie. Lucy and Sam Adams find each other after some agonizing misunderstandings, Eleanor Grantly behaves like an idiot but has a happy ending, and Miss Sowerby triumphs with Palafax borealis over Lady Norton in an encounter that will warm the hearts of all right-minded people.

Alisha says

The cover is certainly beautiful. And while it's not my favorite of Angela Thirkell's books, it's quite nice and continues to have spots of insight where the reader is inclined to laugh a little and say, "Yup." Things must have felt awfully rotten in Britain during the first years after WW II. This book, like many of its predecessors, has the air of bravely carrying on and trying not to mind too much about the world changing around you, even though you're mostly sure it's not for the better. But it's not depressing, it's just kind of poignant. Likeable and occasionally loveable characters.

Kris Larson says

I did enjoy this as much as I enjoy all her books, but I have to say I'm getting a bit fed up with her insistence that all the working class people are intellectually somehow "subnormal," yet also very good looking geniuses. (Example: Subnormal Ed Pollet, a genius with cars, marries subnormal Millie, extremely good looking, and they produce beautiful children who are idiots yet apparently brilliant with machines and plants.) All of these mentally deficient genius tradesmen are apparently content to worship the gentry for...being born into families who used to be rich? Living in nicer houses? It's not clear, but instead of starting their own garages or gardening empires these poor brilliant idiots are quite happy living in tiny cottages and doing the mucky jobs the gentry don't want to do.

But okay. You have to take Thirkell as she is, like how anytime the royal family gets mentioned (which is frequently), one character announces that it makes her want to cry, and then all the other characters have to fight back tears. You just roll your eyes and get on with the story. And vent a little bit on Goodreads afterwards.

Carolyn Haley says

It took me a long time to get into this book, but once I settled into its mindset, I enjoyed the characters and their stories. Very much a British mannerisms style of novel, of the small-village type I enjoy. Recommended if you like stories based in character and place, especially when eccentric. Regardless, Thirkell's work is rich with detail that makes time and place realistic.

Susan in NC says

I haven't been this touched by a book in awhile, especially a book in this, one of my favorite series. I was actually disappointed in the last two books (I'm reading Angela Thirkell's Barsetshire series in order) - the books immediately after WWII were so well-done and I really felt the sheer exhaustion and numbness after long years of war, deprivation, rationing, blackouts; there was still humor, but tinged with melancholy as characters came to grips with a way of life gone forever. Then for a couple books Thirkell seemed to lose her way, humor and touching sentiment gave way to bitching about rationing and social changes - all fair game, but the books became a chore to finish.

Well, she's certainly back on track with Old Bank House; I found this book touching in so many ways, as sweet young Eleanor Grantley encounters sensitive, anxious little Lord Mellings, his strong, practical, tireless mother, Lady Pomfret and the sweet-natured but exhausted Lord Pomfret; begins a rocky romance with Colin Keith (will he FINALLY get to the altar?!?) and we see her elderly neighbor, Miss Sowerby, bid a sad and fond farewell to her beloved Old Bank House. Very touching and full of the gentle, affectionate humor I appreciate so much from this author.

That was just the first half of the book; we also see Eleanor's older brother Tom, a former major in the Barsetshires who saw combat, as he struggles to adjust to civilian life, first as a mortified 28-year-old student at Oxford trying to read Greats, then as a budding farmer (no pun intended!). This brings him into contact

with several old Barsetshire families, the Pomfrets and Marlings and Grahams among others (I struggle to keep all the names straight!), which allows longtime fans to check in with beloved characters and bid a fond and bittersweet farewell to others, meet the new generation and see several romantic entanglements charmingly settled.

I got to know Lucy Marling and Emmy Graham much better in this book, and these two strong-minded, hard-working Amazons of the field and cowshed are among my favorite characters in all of Thirkell's huge recurring cast! And no spoilers, but to see them happily settled with men who share their interests and appreciate them just as they are made for a delightful and satisfying ending.

We also get to spend more time with the fascinating, down-to-earth Sam Adams, self-made businessman, MP and now pillar of the county - his evolution seems complete now that he has taken over stewardship of the Old Bank House from the stately and rather formidable Miss Sowerby. She warns him from the beginning that the "house needs a mistress", and he finally is on the way to acquiring one at the end of the book! I can't wait to read the next installment, County Chronicle, to see what happens next to the delightful denizens of Barsetshire.

Alison says

This book isn't badly written; it's just that all of Thirkell's books are so similar, and I guess I'm getting bored with them.

Joy says

Old Miss Sowerby is forced to sell her family home, and she couldn't have been luckier with her buyer. Sam Adams, who pulled himself up by his own bootstraps to great wealth, has acquired enough polish to make himself welcome among the County. He is generous to others, and The Old Bank House is generous to him. From there he influences his neighbors for good, especially the Marlings. We meet the Grantly family, residents of yet another rectory, follow Major Tom Grantly in his search for a career, and finally find a wife for Colin Keith. This is one of the crucial books I missed -- I'm lucky the library had it.

"Much has been written and said about the relations between people and houses. Some of our friends live in hideous houses ... and yet so inform these graceless tenements with their own personality that after their death we think of them as palaces of delight. Others have inherited or acquired houses famous for their beauty and managed to make them feel like an unfriendly Scotch Hydro.... Again there are houses that always get the better of their owners whether rich, poor, intelligent or stupid. ...For one ugly house that degrades the owner to its own level, there will be found twenty beautiful, or handsome, or elegant houses that have exercised a good influence on everyone who has lived in them. And so it was with the Old Bank House.... To Miss Sowerby it had resigned itself meekly, knowing that although she could not afford to spend a penny on it, she would dust and polish and love as long as her strength lasted. When it saw Mr. Adams approaching, it may have felt some apprehension, but it was too well bred to show it and when it had heard and witnessed Mr. Adams's interview with Miss Sowerby it took him under its wing."

Mandolin says

Angela Thirkell's Barsetshire novels would certainly never be described as great literature and yet there is something so enchanting about them that one can't help coming back to read more. For me, each new book feels like going home to hear all the latest juicy gossip about people I've come to know and love. What the books lack in plot and action is well compensated for by their humor ("Well, it takes all sorts to make a world." "So it does...but how very nice it would be if it didn't. There are so many sorts one could willingly dispense with...") and wonderful characters.

The focus point of this novel, the Old Bank House in Edgewood and its new owner Mr. Adams, provides a perfect illustration for the novel's main theme. Post war England, as many of the "older set" are coming to realize, will be a very different place from the peaceful world they had before the strife. Lines between gentry and commoner grow more blurred each day. People like Mr. Adams, who has become quite more respectable since we met him several novels ago, are stepping in to take the place of the old "regime." How will the people of the county react to this changing world and the many uncertainties it brings? As the older generation is slowly eroded by death, will the younger Barsetshire set be able to take up the reins? Will they, as their parents fervently wish, be able to stand strong against the new threats that peacetime brings like that of socialism, societal instability and moral decay? Will they make the sacrifices of their parents worth the price. And, amidst all this turmoil, will they find love or be forced to face the future alone? Though hope at many points seems dim, they all struggle valiantly to make the best of this changing world and to enjoy its few remaining innocent pleasures with their neighbors and friends.

Thirkell draws on her theme of houses and the way they define and reflect their owners to give us a glimpse of each familiar Barsetshire family, from the dedicated but overworked Pomfrets at Thorne Hall, who must grapple with enormous social responsibilities and limited resources, to the Grahams at Holdings, where the new generation faces the loss of their beloved matriarch, Lady Emily. Glimpses into Edgewood Rectory, Marling Hall, Northbridge and many others provide the reader with plenty of laughter and enjoyment as Thirkell keenly observes and comments on the lives and personalities of the inhabitants. New and sometimes surprising relationships between the families develop, adding to the rich weaving of the tapestry that is Barsetshire.

One of the best things about this book is how very similar the problems that its characters face are to many we face today: things like post-war trauma and uncertainty and socialized medicine ("A pal of mine who knew about these things...tells me They budged for eight millions for dentists. More likely to be fifty millions by the look of it. Not much honest poverty now.") Although I know I miss out on much of Thirkell's humor, which is based heavily on period and British references, enough still comes through to make this book, like its predecessors, a rewarding read. And seeing some of my favorite characters, like Lucy Marling and Mr. Adams, finally find the happiness they deserve made it even better. The mothers of grown up children in these days mostly find...that they are not as selfish as they thought they were and that a treat.

Susan says

This one begins with Mr. Adams buying the Old Bank House and thus moving into Barsetshire society. The young people of the Marlings, Keiths, Deans, and especially the Grantleys are also central. Lucy Marling is

working for Adams, Tom Grantley wants to work on the land but without going back to school, Oliver Marling is still mooning after Jessica Dean, and several major changes take place. Lord and Lady Pomfret appear in supporting roles, and their children, especially Lord Mellings are fleshed out.
