



It pays to do your homework...

BY
CLIVE FEWINS



John and Janet Madden's renovation and extension to a two-bedroomed listed stone cottage in a village on the eastern fringe of Oxford is an object lesson in how it pays to do your homework before embarking on complex jobs on listed properties.

John and Janet rather relished the idea of extending the cottage at the rear to provide some additional ground floor space and some extra bedrooms for when their grandchildren come to stay.

Being a retired builder John was well-versed in the problems - not

least in the planning arena - that can be thrown up by listed buildings. So after he sold his building company and bought the cottage he did some painstaking research before applying for permission to extend.

He managed to get old photographs of the site before the

Second World War, and as well as visiting Oxfordshire County Records office and Brasenose College, which at one time owned the building, he even travelled to the National Monuments Record at Swindon to search for an old aerial photograph.

So when the local conservation officer declared firmly that there was to be no extension to the Grade 11 listed building John was able to prove that almost abutting the house at the rear there was a large two storey stone property that was demolished in 1941.

"When the conservation officer saw the evidence in front of him he realised that we had a very strong case. His attitude rapidly changed from one of downright refusal to one of commenting on the finer points of what we had in mind," said John. "He had totally turned. It was quite stunning."

The irony of the situation was that John and Janet had no desire to add a large extension. But because of John's background in the building trade, the large size of the plot, and the way things turned out because the timber-framed extension really had to be two storey, the new section at the rear is larger than the original house!

Even so, they spend much of their time in the original stone building, where they sleep and have their favourite sitting room. The only room that plays a major role in their large three bedroomed timber framed extension is the kitchen, which in many ways is the hub of the entire revamped house.

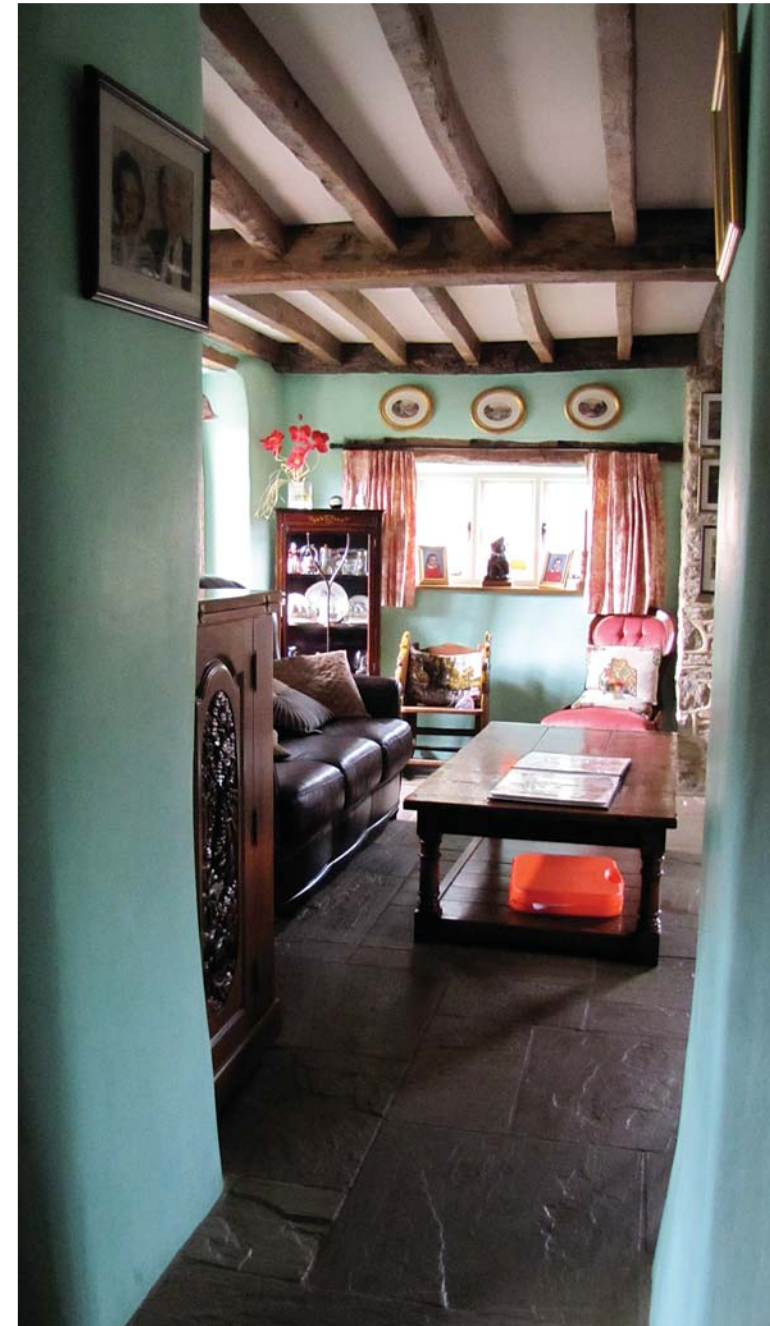
"In many ways the conservation officer and his colleague the planning officer did us a great favour, and we are extremely grateful to them," John says.

Captions?

"This is because they insisted on a link section between the old and new parts of the restyled house. We had previously planned a straightforward extension. When we redrew the plans to include the link we realised that this could in fact prove to be the most important part of the whole project. It has certainly worked out that way, because it has given us a lovely large open hallway with a galleried landing that connects the old and new halves of the house at first floor level.

"We love the staircase - and, of course, the oak frame in the new extension. Oak frame is quick to build and looks magnificent because you see most of the structure of the building. I think it is ideal for extensions to listed buildings like old stone cottages."

The work on the original building was extensive. Although the walls



and roof were sound, it was very dilapidated when John and Janet bought it. This is because it had been lived in by an elderly couple for nearly 40 years.

The front wall was splaying out and needed correction, and the sitting room fireplace had at some stage been reduced in size and had to be rebuilt. In addition John removed the inner walls of blockwork that had been inserted to try and correct the odd angles of the walls.

He also found that after removing the original staircase, which led up from the entrance hall (now incorporated into the sitting room)

one half of the beamed ceiling had to be completely replaced. This set John on a trail that led to reclamation yards all over the south of England in the search for suitable replacement oak beams.

All the downstairs windows had to be replaced, the position of the main door altered, and the chimney stack of the rear section (which turned out to be an extension when the building was stripped down) altered to allow access to the upstairs bedroom from the new landing.

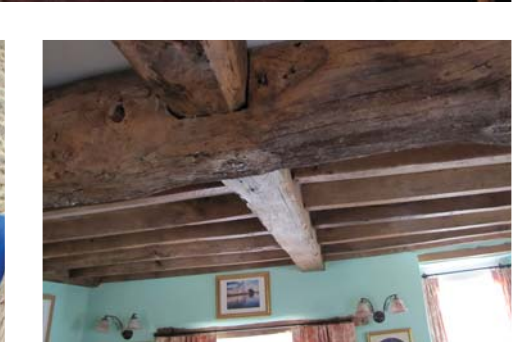
A sliding screen, erected in the 1960s between the hall and sitting room, also had to be removed.

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And in addition the project involved the complete removal of a single-storey flat-roofed rear extension that had contained the kitchen and downstairs toilet. "It was an eyesore and in very poor condition internally," John explains.

Although the upstairs had contained two bedrooms (now one) John was able to tell that the original roof was much lower, from which he concluded that the original building was probably industrial, as there could not possibly have been any full-height rooms upstairs.

He was not able to find out when the building was converted to ➔



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domestic use, but found out that it had been lived in before the 1848 tithe award. "The date of the original building is anybody's guess," he says.

He also managed to establish that by 1848 there were five separate properties on what is now his land. This included three properties at the rear, in addition to a barn.

The timber framed extension at the rear has worked extremely well because it has provided additional bedrooms for their three grandchildren as well as a second sitting room beneath.

John's love of construction - and in particular timber and carpentry - has

meant that in two of the bedrooms he and his team constructed mezzanines. This led to the building of two complex staircases, which he thoroughly enjoyed.

It was the positioning of the oak staircase in the hallway that created the most problems. This was because of the position of the first floor entry from the new building through the thick stone wall of the old.

"Carrying out the conversion and extension was a great labour of love," John says. "After 25 years as the director of a construction company it was nice to get my hands dirty again. Through business contacts I hired

some of the best tradesmen in this part of the country, particularly carpenter Brian Brown. However, running the job seven days a week, and tasks such as erecting the oak frame were very demanding.

"But above all I had not fully realised how much painstaking research in local records would pay of when it came to gaining listed building permission."

Janet looks at it all a little differently. "Much as I like the result, it's really rather large for one retired couple," she says. "Some how the builder in John managed to take over, and the project just grew!"