



History, mystery - and Georgian splendour



"I've given up counting how many rooms there are in this house," says Stephen Mattick. "Probably 12 - one for every year we have owned the property."

In fact there are many more. Six bedrooms for a start, plus three main entertaining rooms, a snug - the site of an old staircase up to the former quarters of transient summer farm workers - and a large kitchen created out of two rooms - a boot room and a previous smaller kitchen.

The 12 year figure is convenient however. This is the time it has taken Stephen and his wife Rosanne to complete the transformation of a very run-down, if largely well-roofed old farmhouse.

Apart from a brick extension to the east, built in Victorian times to house yet more farm workers, the rambling old Grade 11 Listed Cambridgeshire property in three-and-a-half acres is largely timber-framed and has a core dating from about 1550.

Around 1820 it was given a major late Georgian makeover. A striking

south front was built to face what was probably by then an established formal garden, and much of the old timber frame and wealth of beams was covered by a mass of stucco outside and plaster inside.

That stucco - it would be more correct to call it a render nowadays - has been replaced totally by the Matticks as work on the house has progressed. What was left of the original had to come off because the oak frame beneath had shifted over the years. There had been leaks, and patching, and in addition, explains Stephen, it was necessary to inspect the whole of the frame.

"Fortunately most of it was still quite good, so comparatively few repairs were needed," Stephen said. "So we treated it for infestation and then applied as much insulation as possible and a new lime render." Into this render paragon Steve Welch has inserted a splendid running foliate pattern on the oldest side of the house. It is a delightful detail.

However, beneath one section of render on the north side of the house they found no timber frame,

Above: Dairy fireplace. The dairy is one of the Mattick's favourite rooms for relaxing in. When they arrived 12 years ago a brick air raid shelter stood in the middle of the room and the Tudor period fireplace - inexplicably - was four feet up in the wall. Stephen and Rosanne had it lowered to its present position

but Fletton bricks dating from the immediate post World War 11 period. Stephen's theory is that a water tank had sprung a leak and rotted much of the frame and that bricks formed a hasty repair in the depressed immediate post-war period.

Stephen is constantly coming up with further theories about the history and development of the building. "We don't know how many transformations the house has been through - and we don't even yet know what function it performed in World War 11, but it has at several stages had some extremely strange materials buried behind the stucco in the outside walls," he says with a smile.

However that is nothing compared to what the Matticks found when they first moved in during May 2000. The kitchen had been partitioned at some stage, and one of the dividing walls contained all manner of materials of which the most bizarre were several items of packaging and a number of old milk crates. They found these when ➤





Drawing room
The fireplace in this room was transferred to the dining room and the current fireplace was a find on Ebay

removing the flimsy structure.

The floor also had to be replaced, as did most of the downstairs floors, with second-hand floorbricks from the large store kept by Stephen, who designs traditional-style houses for clients all over the country.

Stephen and Rosanne are particularly pleased with the transformation of the large kitchen. It is very much a gathering place for the family - their two teenage daughters still live with them.

They also love the 1946 Aga, which has been converted from solid fuel to oil, and is in use most days.

In October 2002 the Matticks were just beginning to make some

progress, although living in some discomfort in just five rooms with their daughters, then aged five and seven, when the River Granta 20 metres away rose by over five feet after excessive rains, and the entire ground floor was flooded to a depth of 4 ft. It was all due to a problem with the sluice gates,

The oldest part of the house - the former dairy at the rear - was worst affected because the floor level was below ground.

The family lost a large number of valued personal belongings, and Stephen in particular lost much of his collection of memorabilia and irreplaceable documents, as well

as old photographs and cameras.

Today the dairy is one of the loveliest rooms in the house. It alternates with the sun as a family relaxation area. It is also the most transformed area of the house. When the Matticks arrived at the house a Second World War brick air raid shelter stood in the middle of the room. It had to be removed using a jackhammer.

The beautiful fireplace of clunch - a form of soft chalk - which Stephen thinks must be part of the original 1550 building, used to be four feet up in the wall. "We really can't understand this," he says. "Although the original floor level was another



four feet below the present floor, the fireplace was still high up the wall, so we lowered it. I don't think we shall ever solve that one, but I think the answer must lie in a previous floor level, now long-gone."

The original exterior door has been blocked up and plastered over on the inside. But Stephen has retained the original detailing on the outside. "We didn't need the opening, but I like these 'ghost doors' as a feature when they suit the house," Stephen says.

However, Stephen's favourite room is the dining room. "I just love the feel of it," he said. "It was

a lovely room to start with and I believe we did a really good job on it. The fireplace in there came from the drawing room and the drawing room fireplace was a find on Ebay.

Stephen and Rosanna's bedroom on the first floor is accessed by the striking main staircase which dates from the late 1820s. It curves elegantly, and has a lovely set of late Georgian square balusters.

The main bedroom has impressive Georgian proportions to match the staircase, and a low ceiling. A short staircase leads up to Rosanne's dressing room, converted out of the roof void. Here the Matticks

Left:
The house from the west

Top right:
An unusual feature is this hinged casement window, made of metal, inserted in a traditional timber sliding sash window in a bedroom. The sash window has been replaced, but the opening metal casement is original

Bottom right:
The main entrance to the house





Left:
The main staircase

Top right:
On the oldest wing of the house the Matticks commissioned painter Steve Welch to create a running foliate pattern

Bottom right:
Stephen and Rosanne

Far right:
A short staircase leads from the master bedroom to Rosanne's dressing room, converted out of the roof void. Here the Matticks inserted a dormer where there was evidence in the rafters of a previous opening

inserted a dormer where there was evidence in the rafters of a previous opening.

"I still get a buzz when I walk down the main staircase every morning," said Stephen. "It was worth all the work stripping it down, repairing and repainting it."

It was also, he insists, well worth the effort removing all the concrete patches in the hall floor and replacing it with second hand period ceramic tiles. Underneath is the underfloor heating that operates beneath the entire ground floor.

One of the first floor guest bedrooms that leads off the main landing contains an unusual and delightful feature in the large six-over-six rise and fall sash window. It is a small opening casement window inserted within a sliding sash.

The casement window - it is

made of metal - is original, but the frame and the remainders of the sashes are, in common with all the other windows in the house, timber, and new.

The other major structural job on the house was the complete rebuilding of the 1550 chimney.

It was dismantled and rebuilt brick by brick by local craftsman Glenn Darby.

The only completely new section of the house is the single storey ground floor WC, utility room and pantry on the north side that replaces the flat roofed farm office, which the Matticks demolished.

"The farm was run from an adjoining house when we bought it," Stephen explains. "It had been occupied for many years by a lone elderly gentleman, and when he died the family decided to sell. Fortunately I knew them. They were

keen that it should be largely preserved and improved and not over-modernised and ruined. They have been round and seen the complete job and are delighted."

Outside the two new garden buildings look as if they have been there for ever. In fact they were designed by Stephen and built by Glenn Darby and his carpenter colleague, Paul Ashby.

Clever use of materials to make new buildings look as though they have been there many years of this sort is a speciality of Stephen's, and these buildings are a perfect example.

"I love outbuildings," said Stephen. "They are often much neglected." He thinks far too many clients are prepared to commission expensive and beautifully-built new houses then fail to have garages and other outbuildings to match.

"It's all been a huge amount of work and we are still counting the cost," he says. "But I love big houses, and after converting several previous ones - including the barn conversion we used to live in - I reckon this is the best. I intend to go on living here until I drop."

"However, I always say to people wishing to undertake this sort of massive job - beware!"

Before you start always remember that it will always cost more than you had thought, that unforeseen problems will always crop up, and that a bumpy ride with the planners is a near certainty!"

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