

December 2013 – In the beginning...

It all started in the summer of 2013. We were in Aberdeen with family, idly digesting the Press & Journal property supplement and came across a couple of properties with old farm buildings, suitable for conversion. We contemplated the idea, without having really talked about it before and, before we knew it, were quite interested.

Enough so, that we visited properties and fell fairly in love with Mill of Leask, some 5 miles east of Ellon, itself around 18 miles north of Aberdeen. We acquired a family solicitor – most house sales in Scotland are not done by estate agents – and hoped that we would have time to raise the capital to buy. Alas we did not, so we started looking more widely. We drew up a list and worked down it.

Come Boxing Day, we were at the discouraged stage, with three properties to go. The first two were disappointing but we agreed to give the last one, a mile further out from Ellon than Mill of Leask, a go.

Just like the best movies, this last one, East Byreleask Steading, turned out to be 'the one.' On that first visit we liked the feeling of the place but were rather daunted by the size of the building, its rather ruinous state and the $\frac{3}{4}$ acres of jungle. We dragged family out the next day, who agreed. We decided to go for it, aware that it had been on the market for a while already.

East Byreleask Steading is half of a farm that became redundant as the Slains Estate sold the land to neighbouring farmers. Our half is the bigger, with the original (1890s) farm building pretty much in the top-left corner but with a decent strip of land to the north and east and even more room to the south. The courtyard (the inside of the 'U') faces south and the land slopes gently to the south. The interior is set out for holding cattle, but the timberwork, including the roof, is in a poor state. There is a sizable granite building facing the courtyard, which we think is the original farmhouse from before the steading was even built – a handy storeroom/workshop that we immediately dubbed the Bothy.

There is an awful lot of concrete all around – a massive set of walls for a silage pit on the north side, a wall across the courtyard, a massive concrete ramp for feeding cattle and masses of concrete hardstanding. The other half of the farm had the original farmhouse and a few sheds, but had been completely cleared by the time we were there, with a holiday let under construction in the bottom of the property, about as far as it could be from the steading. All good so far!



April 2014 – Waiting...

Within weeks of heading south after Christmas, we had our current house valued, applied for a mortgage to buy the steading and got our solicitor on the case. We had faith in the Scottish system for buying houses (sealed bids and binding oral contracts) and expected rapid progress, with hints from our solicitor that the seller wanted a quick sale – by the end of February.

The scales fell from our eyes, and by March were settling back for the long term. It really did seem - I am being generous here - that no-one was interested in actually getting anything done.

So we were heartened in late April when the solicitor suggested we drop by to catch up on progress. We drove north for a long weekend and were in his office the following morning. He seemed slightly surprised that we had made the effort and, apart from showing us a ginormous map of the former Slains estate, went over stuff that we could easily have done by phone.



We did take the opportunity to go out to the steading. The haar (sea fog) was in and by rights the place should have been a bit creepy. But it was strangely comforting, particularly if we imagined ourselves tucked up around a healthily blazing stove. The main reason for the visit was to work out what

we had in the way of services. We confirmed we have two electricity meters, probably one for the old farmhouse and the other for the farm buildings. We found both ends of what must be our mains water pipe, that the estate had run from the boundary of 'our' property all the way down towards the water main on the public road. We also found a BT pole, with moderately modern-looking cable running up it. Fingers crossed, we would not have too much hassle getting services connected.

We also wanted to see what was happening next door. The holiday let next door was near completion and a supremely large and ugly garage/shed had appeared in line with our bothy – an early target for disguising. The builder had made free and



easy with 'our' land – they had broken into our electricity meter box, used the bothy, left a jumbo bag of rubbish and had dumped an enormous pile of spoil.

