

August 2014 – Proud Owners

The buying saga continued, with both sides blaming the other for holding things up and the seller threatening to walk away. By August, though, it was becoming more obvious that something was happening: We got a draft contract and got our lender to hand over the dosh. We knew we needed an architect, we contacted the one who had submitted the existing planning permission and agreed to meet once we got up there.

As it happened, we were on site with the architect when we got the good-news phone call from the solicitor – that we now owned a derelict farm building and once again have a mortgage – a mere 8 months on from deciding to buy. We had a muted celebration!

The architect had impressed us with his experience of steading conversions and technical expertise, so we passed over our design brief: The current plans are for 3 bedrooms and the west leg of the steading to be partially demolished, shortened and used for storage. We wanted to keep the building to the original footprint, use all the space and have 4 or 5 bedrooms. We proposed the public rooms be in the long north leg and bedrooms/bathrooms at either end. The architect suggested a garage at one end and a gallery – we were happy with those. He will go off and put something together for us. It all seemed much easier than buying the place.

So over the next two weeks we...

- 1) Met the next-door neighbour
- 2) discovered that the steading foundations were never more than a foot below ground level
- 3) disposed of sinister-looking skeletons
- 4) built a 'Mark 1' compost heap from some of the junk lying round the place
- 5) started scrap-metal, firewood, waste-concrete and usable-granite piles and kicked-off a mammoth clean-up operation
- 6) cleared large amounts of broken glass – mostly windows, bottles, from most of the site
- 7) filled the compost heap with scrapings of grass, weeds and soil from our extensive portfolio of concrete hardstanding
- 8) put barrier netting across the main openings into the property to keep potential holidaymakers and farm animals out
- 9) discovered a very large clump of enormous Japanese Knotweed plants
- 10) sprayed the latter with double-strength glyphosate weedkiller
- 11) cleared the sicker looking elder shrubs and cut low-hanging branches on the ash and sycamore trees to open up the wooded area
- 12) demolished a wooden shed down the bottom of the plot, the last of the 'modern' farm buildings to go
- 13) took loads of photos, knowing that we were supposed to provide a portfolio to Aberdeenshire Council as a condition of the planning permission.



October 2014 – Party Time...

We had the opportunity for a quick weekend in Aberdeen in October for a family reunion. One of the builders in the family, Ric, was there for a look-see, having just about agreed to work with us. We had arranged a meet-up with the architect, to do more clearing and one of us decided we had to christen the project with a bonfire party.

The session with the architect was excellent. He had produced draft plans based on our design brief and spent two hours answering questions. He agreed to quote for revised planning permission, a demolition warrant and the building warrant.

We marked out our missing boundaries on the west and north sides with wooden stakes, cut out more elder and low-hanging timber and tidied up the bothy. We also discovered that our local farmer, apart from being a general good egg, had a son with a digger.



pumpkins and a modicum of alcohol. The facilities were somewhat basic – one camping toilet, no running water, no electricity.

Of course, depending on the weather, it could have been heaven or hell. Mercifully it was the former. Very still, unseasonably warm, dry and with clear skies...

So round about the time is was

getting dark we lit the bonfire and barbecue, our guests arrived and we proceeded to keep some 20 souls amused.

The guests included friends from Lowestoft, one of whom is now head of planning and building standards for Aberdeenshire Council – potentially very handy! The bonfire exceeded expectations, making short work of the still-green elder, ash and sycamore. We were treated to a beautiful sunset, a procession of wildlife including barn and tawny owls, bats and geese. We watched a moon-rise and, with low ambient light, masses of stars. All-in-all a very memorable evening.



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Then to the party...

With the whole family behind us, we got a decent bonfire built with old shed timbers and all the ex-shrubs and branches from the wooded area. We had a barbecue, carved

