

# First class carriage house restoration

The Listed Carriage House at the property of Rock House that used to house the horses was anything but 'stable' but that was soon to change.



*View from the top of the staircase, looking down shows the different materials used*

In the course of seeking out conservation projects that will be of interest to our readers, it's always good to come across something that is a bit out of left field, that isn't the typical highly desirable country residence, or historic 'hall house' that has become the next fashionable haunt for fine dining and short stays. Here we have something that has more humble origins, but that in our eyes is equally newsworthy and also allows us to focus on, not just the building but the companies that have brought it back from the brink of collapse and repurposed it into a useful and functional space that is a beautiful combination of modern design and bygone charm, whilst retaining its character and integrity.

#### *Bathroom*



*View of cobbled floor and horse stalls with staircase*

The Carriage House at Chipsted in Kent, is a subsidiary building that is in the grounds of the Rock House, a Grade II Listed Building which is described as an 'irregular house largely dating back to the 16th Century' which has had many restorations and additions over recent centuries, including moulded plastered eaves that are stuccoed with incised lines, a Tudor arched traceried door with hoodmoulds and Regency painted panelling, which means it could be worthy of a whole article of its own, but maybe that's for another time?

For now, we are focussing on the Carriage House, which is also Grade II Listed, Circa 1800s and described as 'stable buildings and cobbled yard to the west of Rock House, a short range of weatherboarded outbuildings with tiled roofs'. Not surprisingly its original use was for storing carriages and stabling the horses



*Interior view before restoration*

for the residents of Rock House, however after many decades of neglect the building was in a state of serious disrepair and had been shored up with props. If something wasn't done soon it was in danger of complete collapse.

The owners engaged the renowned specialist conservation Architects, Clague Architects. With an outstanding reputation of achieving many successful historic restoration and interior design projects over 80 years, and with 60 architects based in Canterbury, Harpenden and London, they were tasked with coming up with a rescue plan and reimagining the Carriage House's future life for the 21st century, and beyond. Once the proposal was agreed with the clients, Clague Architects sought and gained Listed consent for major repair and change of use to an office, gym and storage areas.

The team at Clague Architects, with the project lead, George Esdaile have created an inspired and imaginative plan that makes the

best possible use of the interior space, which is light, airy and largely open plan, whilst retaining the character of the Carriage House. The interiors have been detailed and finished to a high standard with Holly Cook of Clague Architects working closely with the clients to specify the varied finishes and materials. This attention to detail was echoed in the treatment and restoration of the exterior of the Carriage House and the landscaping also.

A T Palmer Ltd, a company that is highly respected as historic building, conservation

and restoration specialist contractors were chosen to carry out the works. They are a long established, multi-generational family business with over seven decades of experience. The Company prides itself in having a highly skilled workforce, covering many disciplines including key trades like: carpenters, decorators, brick workers, specialist joiners, traditional crafts persons and ground workers, so they are the ideal fit for the project.

A glance at a photo of the interior once the work had begun shows the extent to which the old building had deteriorated. Additional temporary supports were installed to allow the removal of internal claddings and rotten timbers. New foundations were dug, steel framework installed to support floors, major timberwork replaced or sensitively repaired. Great efforts were made to retain and reuse original materials where possible to respect the building's integrity and character.

On the outside there were extensive works to

be sensitively carried out as well, including major groundworks to retain the rear ragstone elevation. The roofs were strengthened throughout, and the existing slate and Kent Peg tiles were removed and re-laid, re-using most of the original tiles. This respect to the existing old building was echoed throughout the works, including the careful rebuild of an external ragstone and brickwork wall to match what was there. The before and after photos show the huge extent of the works that were needed and indeed carried out in order for the Carriage House to be useable once again; it is an excellent example of a sensitive conservation project on a listed building.

Having consolidated the old building by ensuring all that could be done to make it structurally sound again, A T Palmer's team began the painstaking work of carrying out the detailed plans for the interior, which entailed fully insulating, plastering and decorating. Their skilled joiners fitted beautiful, new woodwork and engineered oak flooring throughout, including an impressive feature staircase, this is a masterpiece with solid iroko hardwood open treads which cantilever out from a steel stringer which is hidden from view by being boxed into the wall. The treads also sit on supporting structural steels that are notched into the treads. Matte black powder coated steel spindles and structural bars echo the existing ironmongery throughout the Carriage House.



*Before and after*

The pièce de résistance is a graceful undulating, elliptical bespoke oak handrail.

The kitchenette and shower room have been finished with equal attention to detail, with a black and white theme as requested by the client. The black ironmongery is continued in the shower room which is also reflected in the choice of colour for the sanitary ware fixtures, with white units, and in the shower room there are white tiles throughout; hexagonal mosaics on the floor, with metro tiles on the walls, the shower niche, with wall

lighting illuminating the mirror area. The overall effect is smart, chic, minimal and luxurious monochrome elegance.

Another detail on the interior that must be mentioned is the excavation of the existing cobbles on the ground floor. These were lifted, cleaned and painstakingly re-laid, retaining the important feature of the original stable. The stalls where the horses would have been housed and the horses' hay feeders have been reinstated, a very nice touch, tipping its hat to the original use of the building.

Extensive works to the external landscaping has been carried out, with a large change in level between the front and rear of the building. To the rear, a stepped landscaped garden has been designed and formed from railway sleepers, with brickwork retaining walls, a York stone paved path, steps and a flint retaining wall at the base of the landscaping.

The finished result is a total transformation and a testament to all involved with the project – with our thanks to the clients for their kind permission to feature this stunning project, to the vision and imagination of the architects, Clague Architects and to the contractors, A T Palmer Ltd, who have made such a fantastic job of making this sensitive Listed building restoration a reality.

This is obviously a truly successful project and to conclude, here's what the clients Carol Welu and Richard Surrey had to say:

“We are delighted with the restoration of



*Interior of top floor*

the Carriage House and deeply appreciative of the wonderful work done by all involved, including Clague Architects, Adrian Cox (structural engineer) and AT Palmer Ltd. The structure was in a most challenging condition and we were impressed with the creativity and can-do attitude displayed in overcoming serious structural issues. We loved Clague's designs, which are striking and make maximum use of available spaces. AT Palmer Ltd worked with consistent care and remarkable attention to detail. Chris Green and his team were a delight to work with, always responsive and gave excellent advice on how to achieve a first-rate restoration, while remaining practical and cost sensitive, and they produced a superb result.”

***For more information go to: [www.clague.co.uk](http://www.clague.co.uk) or [atpalmer.co.uk](http://atpalmer.co.uk)***