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We've been all too quiet of late, due to several reasons, one of which is our move from Tottenham to Huntingdon. This really got under way last June, though we'd been thinking of moving out of the metropolis for some time before that. One Saturday in June we happened to be on a visit to Cambridge, and since Huntingdon was one of the places we'd considered for moving to, we decided to have a look round. A call at the local estate agent produced very little in the way of houses that hadn't already been snapped up, but there was one house that had only just come in, and we went off to have a look at it.

We liked it so much that we made an offer for it on the spot, and in fact it's the place we are now living in. It is a three bedroom detached house on a newish estate on the outskirts of Huntingdon. We use one bedroom for sleeping in (well, it figures), one as a study-cum-office, and one as a library. There's a garage facing on to the road at the back, and the front of the house looks out over a theoretical grassed open space. So far it hasn't been cleared up properly; it's rough mud and scrubby grass. On this side there isn't a road, just a footpath. The house is about a mile from the station, whence I commute to London every weekday.

As soon as we decided to buy the place, we put our flat in London up for sale. We had a lot of offers (complicated by the fact that the Evening Standard got the postal district wrong on the ad, putting N7 instead of N17, so a lot of people rang up who wanted another area entirely). We found a buyer, contacted our solicitor and fixed up a mortgage.

Our buyer put in a mortgage application with his building society, and their surveyor came round to inspect our flat. He measured up the rooms, had a very cursory look round and went away. The next we heard was that he'd put in a report to the effect that the foundations were shifting, and he couldn't possibly recommend a mortgage. So our buyer, who was still keen, called in a structural expert to inspect the place. HE found it in perfect order, and no doubt collected a suitable fee. But the building society still refused to grant a mortgage to our buyer (whose name was Ian Baxter, so I'll call him that from now on, to save repeating 'our buyer'). Ian Baxter then applied to a second building society, and there was no trouble there - their surveyor made no bad reports, and eventually they offered a mortgage to Ian Baxter. But in the meantime the original Building Society had also come about-face and offered him a mortgage; maybe they'd found out their surveyor was behaving strangely or something... at any rate Ian Baxter now had two offers to choose from and all was well. We worried a lot while all these musical chairs were going on, though.

By the time all this was settled it was well into July. Our solicitors got to work, and we exchanged contracts in due time and fixed up with Pickfords to move on September 1st.



We did move on that day. We'd been assured that we could pick up the keys to our new house from the estate agent in Huntingdon (who had been holding them), but naturally when we got there we found they knew nothing about it. The estate agent phoned the solicitors, who were out to lunch. After they got back from lunch, it turned out that the person dealing with the matter was in court that day, and no-one else knew anything about it. By the time it was all sorted out we had had our moving men sitting outside the house for an hour and a half.

We'd carefully planned our move for a Friday, so that we'd have the weekend to sort ourselves out in. The usual mundane operations like fixing curtain rails took up a lot of the Friday night and Saturday, but by Sunday the place was in some kind of order. I think the moving men were astonished by the number of books and magazines and so forth that we possessed: they'd never seen anything like it, and neither had they brought enough teachests to pack all the books in. Still, they managed somehow, and they didn't break anything.

We applied to have the phone put in, and were pleasantly surprised to find that in Huntingdon you only have to wait about a week. So we are now on the phone again, and the number, for anyone interested, is

HUNTINGDON 56072

We had an extension put in upstairs (at a cost of an extra 70p a quarter, quite a reasonable charge we thought), which is easier on Rosemary, as if she happens to be upstairs she can answer the phone without having to negotiate the staircase. Also we can both answer the phone at once, and hold a three-way conversation with the caller. This is much simpler than one person's trying to listen in while the other is actually holding the instrument. The only trouble is that the person on the other extension comes through much louder than the caller, but one gets used to that easily enough.

Huntingdon is a nice little town. They have made a ring road around the centre, and the High Street area is virtually closed off from traffic. There's a new shopping square off the High Street with a car park under it. The car park is never full on a Saturday morning when we do our shopping, so it is all quite convenient.

The first chance we got we went down to the local library to sign up as borrowers. The library is the headquarters of the county library system, and is a very new and intreguingly designed building. It's a dodecagon in plan, and inside the lending books are on the ground floor, while there is a gallery all around the outside with reference books and a small collection of archeological journals and books. The latter especially is quite a useful amenity for us, even though the University Library at Cambridge is only twenty minutes' drive away. The library appeared to be well stocked, so we wandered off with a supply of reading matter including Beresford's 'New Towns of the Middle Ages' and an inevitable Hornblower story (one of these days I really must buy a set of Hornblower books of my own, I read them often enough).



I've got used to the routine of commuting into London every day; it is not a bad journey really; Huntingdon is served by fast trains to and from Kings Cross which take just under the hour to do the 60 miles, and Kings Cross is within walking distance of the place where I work (in Theobalds Road, Holborn). The only drawback is that the trains are for the most part twice as long as the platform at Huntingdon station, so you have to know exactly where to sit to be able to get off easily (I usually end up having to walk past the restaurant car and kitchens to get off the train, even so).

I suppose one has to balance the daily journey to London and the cost of commuting against the manifest advantages of living in a small town like Huntingdon instead of London. We think it's worth it. A lot of people seem at the moment to be undergoing conversion to this point of view; the man at the station told me that three years ago there were only six people with season tickets between Huntingdon and London. Now there are about 120 and the number is still rising rapidly. The amusing thing is that they all get off the train in the evening, get into their cars (which have been parked all day in the station car park) and try to drive away at the same time. A huge traffic jam immediately builds up in the station approach road, much to the satisfaction of a pedestrian such as myself. I suppose a lot of people must live outside Huntingdon itself, in outlying villages such as Alconbury and Brampton.

There are a lot of Americans living in our neighbourhood. I think they must work at the several airfields in the area. Certainly Huntingdonshire seems over-provided with military air bases: RAF Wyton, Alconbury and Oakington to name but three.

The other morning we were awakened at dawn by strange sounds coming from outside the bedroom window. We looked out and saw a small dog which had worked out a good way of getting tasty morsels out of dustbins. He would go up to a dustbin, nuzzle off the lid, then leap into the dustbin (he was a SMALL dog) and trample about inside on top of the garbage, looking for the best-tasting bits. All this made a most peculiar noise. The canine population of our area is actually quite high, though I haven't yet seen any member of it quite as lovable as the Express Train who used to haunt our block of flats at Tottenham. We called him that because of his habit of racing past our bedroom window panting. He sounded exactly like a train rushing by.

We have a lovely poster on our living room wall. It's copied from a tapestry designed and executed by the arch-Pre-raphaelites, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, and depicts the Achievement of the Sangraal from the Morte d'Arthur. I must admit that we have a particular liking for the Pre-raphaelite style of art (in this I'm a convert due to the influence of Rosemary) and always look out, for instance, for Pre-raphaelite stained glass while visiting churches in connection with Rosemary's Royal Arms researches. But anything Pre-raphaelite appeals to us, even Lux Mundi (otherwise known as the Pink Paraffin Man). But this poster on our wall is specially nice. In the background are mysterious woods and a lake, while in the foreground is Sir Galahad kneeling at the door



of a small chapel in which is a table with the Sangraal on it, tended by three angels. The chapel has a most sturdy door, standing ajar, but appears to have no walls, just open arches on each side except the front. Sir Percivāl and Sir Bors are over on the left at a respectful distance. Not being so pure and innocent as Sir Galahad, they could not of course approach the holy object so closely. They have another three angels for company, though. To my mind one of the loveliest things about the picture is the floral decoration all over the ground, comprising a wide variety of wild flowers, all accurate and obviously drawn from the life. It breathes a sense of life into the composition which the heavily symbolic human figures could never do on their own. And the woods at the back are just the right sort of mysterious darkling woods that suit the subject; not evil, unfriendly woods but the kind that you might expect to meet an ent in, if Malory had known about ents.

Anyway, it's a lovely picture and it cost us less than a pound.

We also have various other posters, mostly of an Art-Nouveau or Toulouse-Lautrec type. Posters are so cheap and can add so much to the decoration of a room, so we use a lot of them.

Well, I've been rambling on but Rosemary tells me I haven't yet described the house properly. So, downstairs one enters through the front (and only) door, which is actually at the side, and finds oneself in a small hallway off which opens the downstairs toilet. Through a further door one enters a large T-shaped room which is divided off as hall, kitchen and dining area, and contains the downstairs telephone and the central heating boiler (gasfired). On the left is the living room, reasonable sized at 18x10, and under the stairs (straight ahead) is a cupboard for coats and the duplicator. Upstairs we have a landing off which opens the bedroom (left) which is huge for a bedroom, being 18' long. We keep in it, besides a bed and things, my clavichord. Straight ahead from the landing is the bathroom, and right are the two smaller bedrooms which we use as study/office (containing our fnz, books, magazines, etc) and as library (the better books and our posh bookcases, as well as the upstairs telephone). Outside the house is a garage for Ptolemy, and just enough garden to suit us. There is also a useless coal bunker which I intend to do away with one of these days.

The garden at present contains a few trees and bushes, lawn and too many roses. I intend to grub up the roses and one of the two pieces of lawn, and plant a rowan and a holly bush, together with snowdrops and crocuses and so forth. I also want to plant a small herb garden in one patch. I don't want to disturb the verdant appearance of the front garden though: it's very noticeable from a distance how our garden is all bushy and green, while all the other gardens in the street have neat rows of small bedding plants or lawn, nothing over a foot high at most.

Well, that's about it. No doubt in a few months I'll have other things to say about our new house.

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