

3 Court Street

Project Details

Phase 1: Funded by Big Issue Invest Loan

Report by: Joanna Winterburn

3 Court Street is a former dentist surgery that had been on the market for nearly a year. The property was empty as the dentist had moved to larger premises down the road.

Driving past it every day with a little niggling voice in the back of my head saying 'you should buy it' and ignoring it.

But it was becoming increasingly obvious that the limited internal space at the school was needed for teaching and not office work. We were also disappointed to find out that we were unable to register the school with an exams board because they required bricks and mortar for the security of exams papers.

In the end I gave in to that voice and went and looked at the property. Oh my what a mess it was but I could see the potential. This could be our exams centre and office, with other opportunities to support our local community. I spoke with the Board of Directors and with their agreement approached the Big Issue Invest to enquire if, in principle, they would support the purchase of the property.

We put in an offer, which was accepted, and became the proud owners of a pretty much derelict building (we didn't know it at the time).

Then began the lengthy process of approaching architects, meeting with conservation officers, surveyors, structural engineers and submitting listed building consent planning applications (x 2).

The second planning consent was granted in mid November, 8 months after submitting the first listed building consent application.

Phase 2: Remedial works funded by an SESF Grant - Big Issue Invest

The global pandemic of 2020 onwards (Covid-19) impacted on our project, with lockdowns, missed deadlines, missed opportunities, timber and other building material shortages and numerous unforeseen, but serious, problems.

We applied for, and were successful in obtaining a grant to help with the works required to turn the old dentist into an exams centre and business hub, with office space upstairs. That was the easy part.

When we started removing the old dentist surgery and peeling back the years of abuse and neglect we found horrors such as the smoke blackened roof beams sitting on a woodworm riddled and rotten piece of 3.1 timber... that A Frame was holding up the whole roof! Not to mention that one of the beams holding up the entire chimney had been sawn through at sometime in the past, or that the front wall was so thin and fragile that it could have fallen out into the road, or that the dentist chair had been sitting on rotten floorboards and floor joists and could have fallen through the floor at any time, or that the 'fire wall' (and we use this term very loosely) to next door was made up of bits of board nailed haphazardly onto timbers with massive gaps...

The remedial work that we needed to do, before we ever got to the plans for converting the property took up most of the grant.

On the way we have found the most amazing things including an imprint of a key in the old lime plaster, and carpenters marks on the later windows.

The local team of craftsmen including carpenters, stone masons, electrician, plus our structural engineer and architect have been working for months (and months) to complete the essential structural and remedial work, moving on to the preservation of the property and making it fit for our purpose as an exams centre, community space and offices.

This project has been complicated right from the start. When we started installing the electrics for CCTV our fears that the front of the building would fall out came to fruition. Not quite as dramatic as its sounds but the shockingly poor job of caring for the property previously (and we use the word 'caring' very very loosely), ie the cement based render (instead of lime render) to the front of this old granite and cob building... fell off!

But when our stonemasons peeled away the rest of the rubbish we found the most amazing faced granite stones underneath.

The plan was to re-render the whole of the front of 3 Court Street, but we were met with resistance not only from our structural engineer, but the local community who said it would be a crime to cover up such beautiful stonework.

These beautiful granite stones will remain on show, and the rest of the building will be painted in approved paint - but its going to be our corporate yellow rather than (boring) white!

As of end of April we are nearly onto second fix inside. The decorator is in upstairs, the interior is going in downstairs.

The rear wall has to take priority with a new structural lintel required above the door and the window, deep pointing, then pointing on top of pointing and rendering, and so on.

We think we are nearly there, and then we find another problem to deal with.

The grant has been and gone.

But when 3 Court Street is finished it is going to be beautiful, and strong, and functional. We can't wait!

The photos below can better describe the journey of 3 Court Street, from a derelict dentist surgery what will become the most beautiful, preserved, high tech property in Moretonhampstead!

The Old Dentist... 3 Court Street



The 'Waiting Room'



The stairs to the examination room



The preparation room



The bathroom



The "Fire Wall"



Holding up the Chimney



Holding up the stairs!



The arrow points to the 3x1inch rotten timber which is the only thing holding up the smoke blackened A frame above.



Exposing the old chimney and oak lintel. That white thing is the fixings for the dentist light that hung over the chair.



An imprint of a key found in the cob on the chimney breast (and preserved)



The floorboards were so rotten we genuinely don't know how the dentist chair, and its occupants didn't fall through.



The chimney will be repaired and pointed ready for lime plastering.



The roof needed supporting whilst repairs were done.



Downstairs corner of old waiting room.



Top of stairs repointed ready for lime plastering.



Replacing the rotten laths with new oak laths. We didn't know these old floor joints were here as they were hidden under a false ceiling. We decided to expose them as part of our restoration.



Using traditional materials for cob, including horse hair, the repair and preservation of the chimney begins. The arrow points to the location of the imprint of the key.



Taking delivery of a huge timber to support the A frame timbers and wall.
Sourced from Fingle Wood.



It took a lot of sweat and tears, some very strong men and a whole load of determination to manoeuvre this huge timber into place.





The metalwork is in to keep the A frame rigid, made by a local blacksmith.



The front wall fell off... but in doing so revealed some beautiful granite faced stones.



Then the back wall fell off...



... revealing the Oak lintel that was holding up the wall to the rear of the property,,,



So nearly there... the fireplace upstairs fully restored.



The Smoke Blackened beams preserved and visible.



The Small window at the top of the stairs with exposed original lintel.



The preserved key imprint.



The front of 3 Court Street with the exposed granite faced stones.



Rear of 3 Court Street, the lintel over door replaced with oak beam, guttering replaced.

