

Station masters



Skipwith Station on the former Derwent Valley Light Railway has been converted into a unique family home, with camping coach-style holiday homes in adjoining carriages

PICTURES: IAN CLELAND

Couple on right track with railway conversions

Renovating and restoring their new home – a former railway station – wasn't enough for Lizanne and David Southworth. They also bought two railway carriages and turned them into holiday homes, as SUE MASON discovers . . .

Garden designer Lizanne Southworth and husband David were "looking for a project" when they learned about the former Skipwith station on the old Derwent Valley Light Railway (DVLR).

"We were looking for something a bit different and we found this place through friends of friends because it wasn't on the market," says blonde, tousle-haired Lizanne.

The Southworths lived eight miles away

in Naburn, near York, so it was simple enough to arrange a visit. "We came one afternoon and said we would put an offer in," she says, as we sit in the cosy kitchen. "The frightening thing was that they accepted, because we just had to guess at the price."

Six months after the verbal deal was done, the family – Lizanne, David, son Alastair and daughter Victoria – moved in, on Valentine's Day 2004.

Skipwith station was built in 1912 and closed just 14 years later, although parts of the line, which ran from Layerthorpe on the



Lizanne Southworth with the original architects' drawings for the railway station

outskirts of York to Cliffe Common, near Selby, later re-opened and was in use until the mid 1980s. A very small stretch was subsequently recreated and survives to this day as an enthusiasts' railway within the Yorkshire Museum of Farming at Murton.

Located opposite Skipwith Common,

Skipwith was the last station on the line before Cliffe Common and had been built to the same design as several other stations in the area. Lizanne has the original architects' drawings.

Originally, the previous owner had used the building as an office for his haulage

“ The appearance of the original station house has been restored, thanks to the careful replication of the woodwork on the exterior ”



The spacious dining area has been created from the station's former waiting room

business, although he later converted it to a house. "They built an extension about 10 years ago as a granny annexe, but inside it was lots of little rooms and everything was oranges and browns," explains Lizanne.

In order for the previous owner to get a mortgage, the original external timberwork had been covered up and no vestiges of the house's railway roots remained. "To clinch the sale, the previous people were on the verge of putting in plastic windows so we said, 'please stop, please stop'," Lizanne tells me.

The new owners' first task was to completely gut the house and knock down walls to create spaces more suitable for modern living. They discovered that not only had the external woodwork been covered up, but that inside, beautiful Yorkshire boarding had been hidden away beneath plasterboards. When they stripped away the plasterboards, what had been the station master's ticket office and the waiting room were both completely panelled with the traditional woodwork.

"It was a thrill to find it," says Lizanne, standing in what is now the sitting room. "The ticket office ceiling was clad in it too. There would have been a wall with a hatch in it just here, and out there (she points to the window) was the weighbridge.

"That old domed fireplace in the wall is original, as is the curved chimney breast, which was clad in horrid 1970s bricks, which, of course, we removed."

The former waiting room has been opened up into a spacious dining area by taking away a wall and installing two sets of double glass doors, set well forward, to create a whole wall of glass which looks out on to open fields.

"When we found the Yorkshire boarding, we sanded it, filled it and Farrow & Balled

it," says Lizanne, who is currently working on landscaping plans for the Terry's Chocolate Factory site in York.

The sitting room and the dining room are open plan to each other and both are decorated with cool neutral walls and carpets, with dark blue soft furnishings. The sitting room has a comfortable blue and cream checked suite while the dining room has a circular glass table and cream leather chairs. Both light fittings were purchased in nearby Selby; the one above the dining table, with lots of blue glass, is particularly

striking. "When we did the work, we had to camp in the bedroom but because it had been a granny annexe, we had a kitchen in there, although I'll always remember the snow that February," comments Lizanne, who created a spacious entrance porch outside the original front door; this is now also the bedroom for the family's two chocolate labradors, Whispa and Mimi.

The front door used to open directly in to the kitchen (originally the ladies' waiting room), but Lizanne was very keen to have an entrance hall.

The old kitchen was ripped out and the skip got bigger. A new floor was laid and a new roof put on, with red tiles more like the original. "Dryden and Kennedy, who did the roof at Skipwith Hall, did our roof," says Lizanne. "I think they like interesting projects."

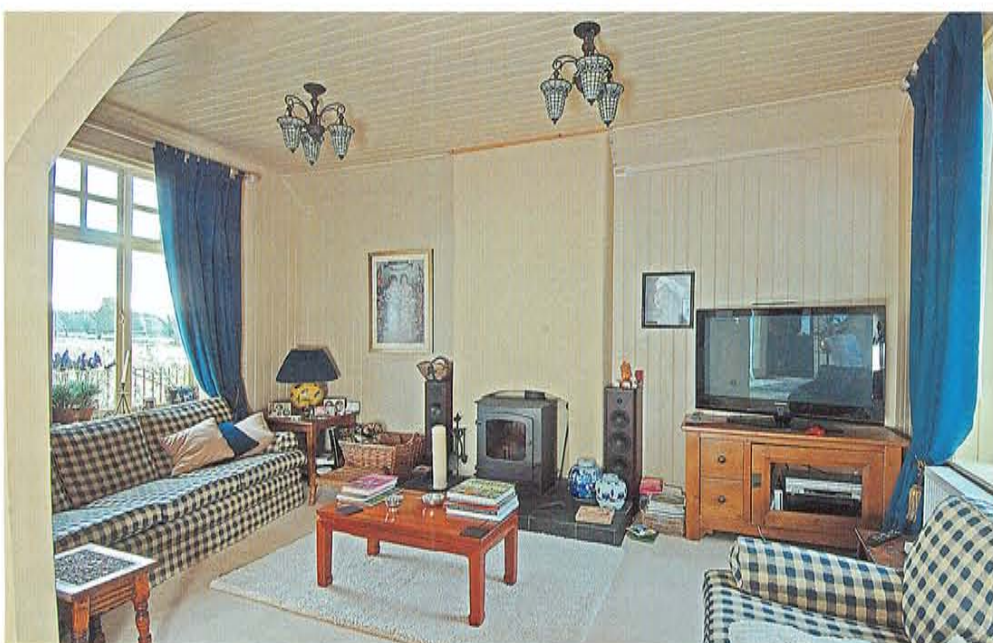
The new hall has been decorated in a restful stone colour which is a backdrop for several pieces of characterful antique

Continued on Page 8



RIGHT: The new hall has been decorated in a restful stone colour which is a backdrop for several pieces of characterful antique furniture, including a grandfather clock. An antique birdcage hangs from the ceiling and is quirky plant holder

BELOW: The sitting room is decorated with cool neutral walls and carpets, with dark blue soft furnishings



Kitchen of the Month



Dr and Mrs O'Sullivan.

Today we are in the village of South Cave demonstrating a very interesting blend of traditional and modern styling in this large open-plan kitchen.

Our design features a painted shaker style door, finished in vanilla and accented by turned oak knobs.

Firstly the areas you can't see – a massive double larder with clever storage built into the doors is situated next to an American side-by-side fridge freezer. Opposite, a marvellous preparation area is topped with a 15 feet long slab of Kashmir Gold granite surrounding a Villeroy and Boch farmhouse sink. The unusual pewter tap is by Perrin and Rowe of Mayfair.

Wall units and a pair of custom made plate racks keep everything close to hand and in its rightful place.

Carrying on with the general design theme of symmetry, the large range cooker proudly sits between matching pillastered cupboards above which it is framed by an elegant mantel with glass shelved dressers.

About a metre in front of the range is the granite and oak topped island, almost 3 metres wide by 1 metre deep. Lots more storage, cupboards with drawers and useful self-closing pan drawers. The dining room side of the island has been finished with 2 specially designed wine racks on either side of a casual breakfast bar alcove.

This project included a large utility room furnished in the same style.

We conclude as usual with a lovely quote from Mrs O'Sullivan,

"Everything went smoothly – really well"

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The kitchen has underfloor heating and a large, four-oven navy-blue electric Aga which came from a guest house in the Yorkshire Dales

Continued from Page 7

furniture, including a grandfather clock. An antique birdcage hangs from the ceiling and is a quirky plant holder. The new kitchen was created from one of the original bedrooms in the extension and runs from the front to the back of the house, with the breakfast bar area at the rear opening on to decking which has been laid over the original platform.

"Although the station closed in 1926, part of the line was opened up again during the war. Because it was only a single track line and very overgrown, it was invisible from the air and was used to carry munitions to the airfield at Elvington," said Lizanne.

The kitchen itself has a stone floor with underfloor heating. To one side, next to the simple wooden units, is a huge American-style fridge-freezer; on the opposite wall is a large, four-oven navy-blue electric Aga which came from a guest house in the Yorkshire Dales. Lizanne found it for sale on the internet and had it fitted by an Aga expert from Malton.

"Through there we've just had to redecorate," says Lizanne, pointing to the long extension. "And because it wasn't part of the original railway building, we didn't have to be concerned about recreating the period look, as we have done elsewhere."

The appearance of the original station house has been restored, thanks to the careful replication of the woodwork on the exterior by Yorkshire Rose Woodcraft, who also did the new windows. To complete the



ABOVE, left: Another view of the station dining room; two sets of double glass doors create a "wall of glass" looking out to fields. Right: The breakfast area



authentic look, the wood has been painted pale green and the plasterwork in country cream. The exterior and interior decorating was done by Livsey of Stillingfleet.

"We replaced all the windows, which were flush when the house was first built, but which had become recessed after the original timber frame was encased in concrete," said Lizanne. "The new windows are properly flush again."

In 2004, the couple also bought two railway carriages, which they have just finished transforming into self-catering holiday accommodation. "My husband knew that the Doncaster Carriageworks was closing down, so we went along and had a look and chose two that were not too bad," says Lizanne.

"They'd been forgotten about and were on a track overgrown with weeds. They are both 1970s carriages. One is a standard coach and one is a first class and mail. We got one company to bring them here and somebody else lifted them in to place," says Lizanne, showing me photographs taken on the day. "We got them in place before we exchanged contracts, which was mad, really. Our solicitor was pulling his hair out but we knew it was going to be all right."

The two British Rail standard Mk 2 carriages were once used on the west coast main line between London Euston and Birmingham, Manchester and Scotland and were withdrawn from passenger use in 1991. They then served for over a decade for locomotive testing at Doncaster Works.

I ask Lizanne if David is a train "anorak" and that's why they bought the carriages, which stand on their original bogies on a small piece of track which the couple laid in a week. "He isn't an anorak, but he is in the rail business," she explains. "We just wanted to have a theme to what we chose."

The carriage windows had been welded up, so uncovering them was the first task. The original seating, no longer needed, was taken out and sold online. "A small private railway company bought the seats and someone else wanted the metalwork underneath the carriages," says Lizanne, who used Ivy Windows from North Duffield for the carriage conversion work.

Both holiday apartments have two bedrooms, one with a double bed and one



Views inside a bedroom and two of the lounges created inside the old railway carriages

with bunk beds. They also have a kitchen, dining room and wetroom shower, and the windows are etched with the words "Skipwith Station" – obviously not historically accurate, but a nice touch.

So gone are the bike and post cages and gone are the old BR seats and crimson colour schemes. The internal structure, though, is more or less the same, with an old parcel shelf being a very useful place for guests to store their suitcases.

The "Derwent Mail", as one coach is called, is more open plan and is suitable for wheelchair users, while the "Derwent Flyer" has a separate dining room, with planked table and seats. In one of the old first class carriages, the number "1" is still on the window. The kitchen was also converted from a first-class compartment with double sliding doors.

Throughout, the decor is contemporary cream, with dark brown seating. The Flyer's sitting room was originally two of the carriage's compartments and it has two sofas, a dresser and a flat-screen DVD, while in the Mail, the former guard's van and mail room has been converted into the open-plan kitchen/dining area and sitting room.

Lizanne and David are convinced the "holiday cottages", which have taken the 60s concept of "camping coaches" and given them a very 21st century polish of comfort and style, will be popular – not only because of the closeness to York but because the area is a perfect place to enjoy rambling, horse riding, bird watching and other country pursuits. Skipwith Common, for example, is a designated Special Area of

Conservation, comprising 300 hectares of unspoiled heathland; one of the few remaining such areas in the UK.

The three-acre site also has stables with livery for two horses, which holiday guests can book. And there's also a huge shed just beyond the railway carriages. What's in that?

"Oh that's just David's glory hole," says Lizanne. Then she adds, somewhat sheepishly: "We're putting in a planning application to turn the shed into a house so the railway station can be a holiday let too."

■ For more information log on to www.skipwithstation.com

CONTACTS

■ Skipwith Station Holidays: Skipwith Station, North Duffield, Selby, YO8 5DE. Tel: (01757) 282288. email: Bookings@skipwithstation.com.

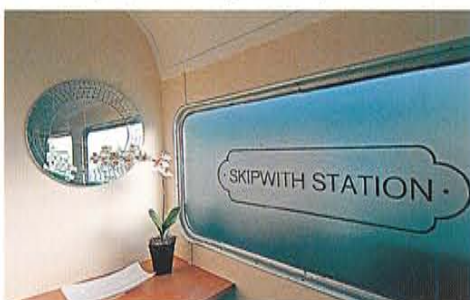
■ Dryden & Kennedy: Trent Street, Goole. Tel: (01405) 763886

■ Nick Rose, Yorkshire Rose Woodcraft: Whitley Bridge. Tel: (01977) 550100

■ Livsey Decorators: Fairview, York Road, Stillingfleet. Tel: (01904) 728179

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RIGHT: The carriages stand on a small piece of track which Lizanne and David laid in a week



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