



Rescue renovation

Writer
Emilia Ong

Images courtesy of
Ian Titherington DesignIT

As Harbour Street's Celandine Hall prepares to open its doors to new tenants, we go behind the scenes of a restoration project that has brought this historic building back to its former glory and ready to welcome the modern age

Think of a building as a body, a person, a life. As the years roll by, time takes its toll. Sometimes the building exceeds expectations, sometimes it falls short of them; sometimes it meets challenges, sometimes it succumbs to them. Gradually, plans are replaced: like a person in crisis, adaptation is called for. If it doesn't adapt in time, the building starts to drift. It doesn't know what it's meant to be or what is coming next; it has no sense of purpose. Change becomes urgent, but the building can't change on its own. An intervention must be staged.

A "rescue mission" is an apt description of the task architectural designer Ian Titherington undertook. Indeed, when he first saw it, Celandine's interior looked, he says, "like little more than a hotel for pigeons". Tired was not the word: the

place was broken by neglect. Walls were "raw, scarred, and undecorated". Worse, water had got in, wreaking profound internal damage. This was never going to be a merely cosmetic renovation. Ian has been working on the restoration for nearly two years - a period which, even extended by multiple lockdowns, is indicative of the effort, passion, and pure love being plunged into Celandine Hall.

Now on the cusp of completion, and set to be ready for tenants in March, the building is once more showing off its true magnificence. The proportions are grand: with 7,500 square feet of space stretched over four floors, it is now a light-filled, elegant example of how heritage properties can excel when tended to with care. Ian Smith and Ryan Morgan, of East Kent construction company Morgan & Smith, have been working with Ian to realise the new vision. They tell of the extensive structural work they have done, including the installation of a new roof, repair of the first and second floors, and virtually a total rebuild of the back of the building.

Grade II-listed Celandine Hall was built in the early 1800s and registered first as a toy shop in 1849, before being transformed into a drapers and gentlemen's outfitters in 1885. Subsequently it was annexed by the Hyland, Lewis & Linom department store. Celandine's most recent incarnation was as an indoor market, which shut in 2014, after which the building proceeded to fall into a near-

derelict condition.

Morgan & Smith's first job was to gut the place, but this turned out to be the least of what lay ahead: they discovered that five original windows had been completely bricked up, whilst the grand skylights - "lanterns" - over the main hall had been "held together with duct tape". The latter have now been replaced by soaring glass in the original design: throughout the building both designer and builder have, where possible, endeavoured to retain and seal historical features "as found". This means that besides from the restored ceiling rose, cornicing and decorative pilasters, future visitors will be able to see, for example, panels of exposed brickwork. This was not mere rescue: Celandine was on life support. Together, the team have effected a miracle resuscitation.

They have not, however, done it on their own. It takes a very special sort of owner to commit to realising such a project, and such owners are rare. But 29-31 Harbour Street has been fortunate: sisters and owners Bella Landen and Sophie Hubble are passionate not only in, as they put it, "repurposing, revitalising and rejuvenating" property, but also in the pressing concern of coastal regeneration. Though they live in London, they have strong family ties to Kent, and are keen on exploring the manner in which "breathing new life into buildings" can also mean breathing new life into, well life, that of a town and its people.

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This well-known local property has a history spanning from the 1800's and was best known as part of the Lewis & Hyland drapers and fashion store, before becoming Celandine Hall - an indoor market.

At the Royal Harbour end of the High Street Shopping area, it boasts tourist and local footfall, as well as good transport links.

It is currently enjoying extensive external refurbishment as well as internal works.

Subject to planning, the space and layout of the site would suit a range of commercial enterprises.

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These days we are more accustomed to seeing boarded-up shop fronts than exemplars of Victorian architectural grandeur, but the sisters hope that the revamped Celandine will prove to be “a trailblazer”. As such, they are firm about the fact that they are seeking a tenant whose presence will enhance the high street “for everyone”. It is not only about attracting more visitors, but also more businesses whose presence will buoy up the local community as a whole. “If you build it, they will come,” Sophie says. “We want Celandine Hall to be a big sign to others that yes, there are investment opportunities here.”

During a period of extreme flux, with shops closing and commercial premises standing empty, many towns are wondering about the future. Likewise, Ramsgate stands at a crossroads: does it need more retailers, or places in which we can gather, get out of the house, engage in leisure activities, and learn new skills? The sisters believe the latter is the way to go, and Ian agrees. In fact, he says, high street strategies across the country are consciously reducing their focus on retail. “Shops follow other successful ventures,” he stresses.

So what exactly might we expect to see once Celandine opens its doors to the public? There is no reason it should have a single tenant. Having no definite “end user” in mind was one of the challenges Ian faced in the original brief, and he has therefore created what he refers to

as a “shell” - a high-quality space into which the greatest number of potential businesses can fit. Sophie and Bella have a few ideas: it could accommodate a gym, they say, a gallery and café, an educational institute, a theatre or music venue, or even a microbrewery.

There is no doubt that the location is prime, the light wonderful, and the future bright. “Buildings,” says Bella, “are living things, and we can and should nurture them back to health.” It is notable that we use many of the same words for our buildings as we do for our bodies - restore, repair, renew, update, fix, makeover, even give a facelift - for there is something about the restoration of Celandine Hall which goes beyond the mere transformation of bricks and mortar. The project feels hopeful and forward-looking, emblematic of the energy each one of us is hoping will carry us through 2021.

Follow DesignIT Architecture on Instagram @diarchitecture.co.uk or visit the website diarchitecture.co.uk for updates on progress at Celandine Hall

Morgan and Smith Construction are on Instagram @morganandsmith_construction

For general and leasing enquiries regarding Celandine Hall contact Bella Landen at bellalanden1967@btinternet.com