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Merchants' IVORY

A house that has witnessed both prosperity and poverty throughout its fascinating history has been sensitively brought into the current era by the Glynn family

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THIS IMAGE The handsome facade dotted with climbing roses
TOP RIGHT The rear of the house, which now boasts an orangery leading off the kitchen



There are few houses that are smaller than stately homes, yet draw a gasp of breath from visitors when they arrive at the gates. The home of Mary-Louisa and Robert Glynn, however, is one of them. Built by the merchant William Arnold Peacock in 1690, the house, with its handsome facade that pink roses climb up at this time of year, and which is neatly punctuated by decorative gabled ends, is of local importance. Situated deep in a picturesque Conservation Area and, crucial to its origins, within a series of villages in the marshy fens of Cambridgeshire, each originally served by a lode – a stream converted to a canal which led to the river and a medieval port, enabling goods to be moved by water – the house was passed down through generations of merchants.

There were once offices on the ground floor, while the merchant's family would have lived on the first floor and housed their servants in the attic. As the business grew, so did the house, with additions made in 1750 and in the 1820s, including two counting rooms on the ground floor. Today these are the kitchen and the playroom and retain the original safes. In the basement below are vast cellars for wine, beer and coal, which once supplied seven pubs in the village.

When the merchant Thomas Bower died in 1824, having managed the business for some years, he was said to be worth £35,000 – a few hundred ➤

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The hall still boasts its original tiled floor. An inherited dresser displays the couple's collection of Sally Dennis china (dennischinaworks.com), while the trug and secateurs are from Burgon & Ball (burgonandball.com)

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Key facts

LOCATION Cambridgeshire
PERIOD The Grade II listed house was built in William and Mary style, in 1690
SIZE Six bedrooms, four bathrooms, a drawing room and sitting room
OWNERS Mary-Louisa Glynn, an interior designer and co-founder of Chameleon Interiors (chameleon-interiors.co.uk), Robert, and son Jolyon, along with Harry the hound



million in today's money – and it was described on the sale particulars of the house that the business "was one of the most lucrative mercantile concerns in the kingdom." Yet while the property passed to another merchant in 1847, the popularity of the railway signalled the demise of the canal trade, and by 1867 the business was sold off in lots.

The house also receded into gradual decline and eventually became semi-derelict. Bought for a mere £600 in 1939, it was partially restored but fell

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into poor condition again by 1990. When Mary-Louisa and Robert came to see the property six years ago, when it came up for sale, its roof had been repaired by the then owners, enabling the attic rooms to come into use, yet there was still a huge amount of work needed to make the home worthy of its facade.

'I fell for it instantly,' says Mary-Louisa, recalling her viewing that May. 'I loved the exterior and the period features such as the tiled floor in the hall. It had a very happy atmosphere and huge potential.' It was also the perfect size for the family, who had outgrown their former home. 'Our son Jolly was three when we moved into the house. He ➤

ABOVE LEFT The garden is filled with colour in summer months
ABOVE RIGHT Mary-Louisa and Jolyon
RIGHT The maple kitchen was designed by Goddards Interiors (goddardsinteriors.co.uk) with practical Corian worktops. The table is topped with a tablecloth from Cologne & Cotton (cologneandcotton.com), and the roses here and throughout are from David Austin Roses (davidAustinroses.com)





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ABOVE The formal first floor drawing room is decorated in tones of gold. Mary-Louisa painted the window pelmets in Gold Ardenbrite metallic paint, and the room contains the couple's collection of Royal Crown Derby (royalcrownderby.co.uk). The sofa is from Artistic (artisticupholstery.co.uk) and the carved coffee table is from Jonathan Charles Fine Furniture (jonathancharlesfurniture.com)

My advice

Mary-Louisa's insights on restoring a house of historical importance.

"While most of us consider that maintaining and restoring key period features and the home's original character is key, why not go a step further and echo some of the features in the furnishings? If you have an arched shaped window, for example, as we do in our guest bedroom, bring in a similar shaped mirror, lighting or pelmet, for emphasis. Take colour cues from the period of the property. Brands such as Mylands and Farrow & Ball have developed colour ranges derived from historical properties. Use your palette to make the house flow from room to room."

would climb over the garden fence and end up at a neighbour's for breakfast! This house was spacious, but being on three floors meant we could design it so that we could literally shut off the top floor when we did not have guests. It also has impressive grounds and a 'secret garden' for Jolly to explore.

Remodelling the house to suit their lifestyle was a considerable undertaking. After being granted planning permission to add an orangery at the back of the building, work started on the study, off the hall. When they removed the wallpaper and MDF boards cladding the lower half of the walls, it 'revealed damp was rising over head height and in the joists.' Damp engineers were subsequently called in to tank the study, and inject the walls in several rooms to prevent rising damp, before the walls were re-plastered and decorated.

While the original features of the house, such as the shutters, the intricate front door and beautiful windows, were repaired and preserved, the kitchen was ripped out. "There was a pantry built in the 1930s and a tall passageway with units fitted very high up, which we took out, as well as a very old Aga which drank oil," says Mary-Louisa. A new kitchen in maple was designed and fitted ➤

TOP MIDDLE The curtains in the family sitting room are made from GP & J Baker fabric (gpjbaker.com). On a chest Mary-Louisa displays her collection of Halcyon Days boxes (halcyondays.co.uk), which her father buys her as gifts
TOP RIGHT Old bellows and fire tools adorn the fireside
RIGHT This room, with its ornate, working fireplace, has a relaxed feel and a warm palette, perfect for cosy family evenings in. The plain armchair is covered in cushions from Colefax & Fowler (colexfax.com)

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'Sometimes when we use the drawing room, I wonder what it would have been like here in 1690'



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as she was keen to have the warm effect of wood. Meanwhile the top floor of the house had been used as a flat by the former owners and contained a kitchen, which Robert and Mary-Louisa took out, and they removed the partition wall to create larger rooms and give the space a better sense of flow.

Robert oversaw these more structural parts of the renovation, while Mary-Louisa focused on the interior design. She often took her cue for decorating each room from a key piece. Her mother had handmade American-style quilts and these became the basis for the colour schemes, patterns and wall coverings in the bedrooms. In other rooms there was a conscious decision to create a scheme which reinforced how the room would function: the first floor drawing room, the more formal of the two sitting rooms, features embroidered silks and a layered pale gold palette, inspired by the Colefax & Fowler curtain fabric.

Now complete, the ground and first floors work perfectly for family life, the first floor drawing room is the preserve for entertaining, and the top floor is for guests. "Sometimes when we use the drawing room, I wonder what it would have been like and how would people would have dressed when they sat here in 1690," says Mary-Louisa. "I'm so pleased we could bring the house into the 21st century, but we're also protecting it for the future." ➤

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TOP LEFT The guest bedroom was designed around the American-style quilt made by Mary-Louisa's mother. The bedside table was from her mother-in-law and the carafe and glass a present from her sister
TOP RIGHT Jollyon's bathroom features blinds made in Maritime fabric by Lewis & Wood (lewisandwood.co.uk)

LEFT In the master bedroom, the window, with its fully restored shutters, boasts a comfy Busby fabric-covered seat (busbyfabric.com). A Roberts radio and Cologne & Cotton pillow complete the quiet space for reading or relaxing