MOVING TIMES

A seasonal Newsletter from Dakin Estates

Issue 3 November 2004

A Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to All

THE TREASURE HUNTERS TALE

50 years on Alan Horne searches for lost gold in darkest Essex,

Regular visitors to Dakin Estates sites will be familiar with the invariably becapped figure of Alan Horne (Big AL), Dakin Estates Contract Manager and veteran Suffolk craftsman of the old school. When Dakin Estates purchased two barns for conversion near Epping in a deal brokered by Carter Jonas Alan took a more than usual interest not only in the barns, but also in the village and its inhabitants.

It transpired that Alan had spent his childhood in an estate cottage within sight of the barns in the early 1950s prior to his parents moving to Suffolk. Although Big Al had not visited the area since childhood, he vividly remembered both the village and some of the local characters in the farming community about whom he was able to reminisce with older villagers.

He vividly recalled the barns at Home Farm which he was now called upon to convert and in which the farmer to allow an old tramp to sleep sometimes. The tramp, dishevelled and eccentric was something of a bogeyman to "Little AL" (as he was then known!) and other village children.

There was a local legend that the tramp had hidden a fortune in gold somewhere in the barns and fifty years later Alan was noticed taking a very keen interest in any excavation work on site but, sadly, no treasure was discovered.

However, what did materialise from this particular development project was a design award from Epping Town Council accepted by Nick Dakin on behalf of Al and other colleagues at a presentation at the Council's AGM.

And Big AL?....

He's rather have found the tramp's treasure!

DAKIN ESTATES LTD

Useful Numbers

Planning, Sales & Acquisitions:
NICHOLAS DAKIN
01638 508612

Building, Accounts & Technical:
JAMES DAKIN
01359 221177

Please note that Dakin Estates will not be sending Christmas Cards this year but are making a donation to charity.

VIEW FROM THE HEATH

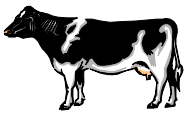
Thomas Clayton reviews the shooting season.

In addition to his many other interests Thomas Clayton runs shoots in Berkshire, Norfolk, Leicester and Northumberland providing 60-80 shooting days a year.

A keen country sports enthusiast, he has attended pro hunting demonstrations in Brighton and London and has twice been cautioned by Police for, (we are desolated to report!), throwing flour at labour MPs.

"TC" reports that the shooting season has started well this year with a good strong showing of wild birds and little trace of disease all hallmarks of a bountiful season with good sport. TCs ideal shooting day is windy but overcast and dry with ideal terrain being a walk up slope with plentiful cover in the shape of copses and game strips.

However TC is not reliant on the British climate as the essential component of a good day and is unequivocal about the essential ingredients to a good days shoot – the quality of the lunch and the company.



BURY CATTLE MARKET

Any town anywhere……

In Dakin Estates "ops room" over 40 black pins are stuck in a map on a wall. These represent conversion projects we have undertaken over the last 20 years and whilst they cover a very wide area (as far as Crawley in the south and Derby to the west) the vast majority are centred around Bury St Edmunds, a town which we love and which at one time housed our offices.

A town, which perhaps, is about to lose the unique charm and character which makes it so special, yes, this is about the new cattle market retail development, a controversial scheme which a determined local authority has been agitating for for years despite opposition from most of those who actually live in the town and probably all those who visit it to sample its unique charm.

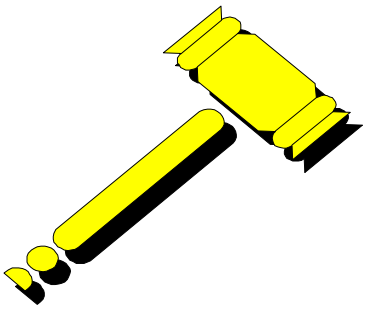
The powers that be claim that the scheme will take Bury into the future but it is cheerfully admitted that it will adversely affect small independent retailers in the town. In other words, it will be just another high street with all the same clone chains of shops as every other town.

Perhaps those in authority should take note of the actions of the landlords and another unique and historic retail conurbation, London's Covent Garden. Here the landlords actively discourage major chains from taking out leases and offer incentives to small independent quality retailers to open up shop.

Why? Their reasoning is simple – if they allowed the major chains to take over Covent Garden, it would not only lose its unique character and charm but would be competing with every other high street in Britain and no one would have a reason to visit it.

Refreshingly sensible stuff but too late for Bury, soon to become anytown anywhere.

UNDER THE HAMMER



Overview of Autumn Property Auctions

Traditionally the season for auctions this autumn has seen a number of properties for development or restoration go under the hammer with interesting results.

An early start by Cheffins in Cambridge in July yielded a disappointing response where four out of five residential properties failed to reach their reserves due possibly to the holiday season and the beginning of a wave of adverse publicity about house prices. Their one result, however, was a good one with bidding on a 2600f2 farmhouse for renovation in Melbourn reaching £405k against a guide of £350-£375k.

In August however, John Martin also bucked both the holiday season and pessimistic publicity achieving £380k against a guide of £250k for a single plot in Hilton, Cambs.

In September Cruso Wilkin achieved an impressive £240k against a guide of £140 for a single barn at Ringstead on the Norfolk coast with consent to convert to a house of 1800f2 whilst Aldridge Landsell raised £232k against a guide of £250k on derelict barn and cottage with four acres but no planning consent at Bracon Ash just south of Norwich.

In October Brown & Co sold Holly Farm Winfarthing, Diss, a holding unchanged since the first World War, achieving £230k against a guide of £215k for a period farmhouse of 2124f2 and £185k for a barn with consent to convert to a house of 2500f2 against a (very accurate!) guide of £185k.

In a separate auction at the Maids Head Hotel Norwich, Brown & Co achieved an impressive £850k against a guide of £700k for a 4000f2 derelict house in the City's prestigious Newmarket Road.

The month finished with a good turnout but very reluctant bidding for a derelict medieval house in 2.7 acres at Bardwell near Bury St Edmunds as auctioneers Richard Green squeezed £167k against a guide of £180k and a declared reserve of £165k - a result which probably surprised all present and which could only be attributed to the planning consent which allowed only for a separate garage with accommodation above rather than an extension to the (quite small) house itself.

November started with a second auction by Cheffins where finely judged guide prices and steady bidding achieved £200k for a single building plot in Orwell (guide was £190k-£210k) and £224k for a sixties house of 1400f2 behind the church at Horningsea Cambridge (guide was £200-£220k). Another sixties house of 1200f2 at Ridgewell near Clare achieved £186k against a guide of £180-£200k although the traditional gents outfitters Peddars of Clare saw their shop failing to reach its reserve despite planning consent for conversion to two residential units and a commercial unit. A cottage at Newmarket was also withdrawn.

Although early December saw a, (frankly not very nice), building plot in Bourn near Cambridge failing to reach its reserve against the guide of £350k placed upon it by John Martin & Co. the season closed on a high with Thos Gaze selling a 14000 sq. Ft. Elizabethan Mansion (until recently a hotel) south of Norwich for £760k against a guide of £750k and Brown & Co., again wielded the gavel to good effect, proving the continuing popularity of Newmarket Road, Norwich by selling a second derelict town house of approximately 3000 sa. Ft for £510k.

An interesting season for property auctions showing that properties with realistic reserves and guides in reasonable areas are still in demand in the saleroom and even exceeding guides.

"House prices seem to have peaked and a decline may be expected in the future."

No! - Not our forecast but that of Jackson Stops at the end of 1946 "The first clear year since the War" and is one of many gems gleaned from six old bound volumes of "The Field" 1946-48 purchased on impulse at Gazes rural bygone auction for £16.

Never was £16 better spent! A wealth of articles, advertisements and photographs give a fascinating snapshot of the English countryside struggling to return to pre war normality in the years following the social and national upheavals of the WW2.

There is little sense of imperial sunset as adverts offer Abdullah cigarettes, Booths Dry Gin, The Greener "Empire" sporting gun and a farm in South Africa "developed by an Englishman".

The well off are tempted by big game safaris in Africa "with reliable white hunters" whilst one photo shows the maharajah of Kashmir surround by a sea of dead animals "including two tigers" shot by him in a single day.

The well off might also be tempted by the adverts for luxury cars the slogans of which reveal an established pecking order with Rolls Royce "The best car in the world" as undisputed leader followed by Bentley "The silent sports car", Jaguar "the finest car of its class in the world" and then by Rover "one of Britain's fine cars". Anyone wishing further input need only to turn to The Fields motoring column written by no less than Sir Malcolm Cambell himself.

Smaller adverts reflect the shortage of housing, labour an, for some trades, employment after the upheavals of war, as Stablemen and chauffeurs advertise their services whilst "Gamekeeper recently demobilised seeks post with gentleman" and Hilborough Hall near Thetford advertises for a head gardener "good cottage available" albeit with…. "no mains or electricity as yet."

One of the bigger property transactions in 1947 was the purchase of a country house with 9000 acres, 34 farms, 2 pubs and 148 cottages as well as 3 advowsons (Ecclesiastical livings) for the princely sum of £400,000.

Interesting stuff and a unique snapshot of country society at all levels returning from all corners of the globe after five years of war, trying to get back to their niches in rural life and assuming that things in the countryside would just carry on as before in the old pre war, semi feudal way not realising that their society, their country and their countryside had been changed forever and things would never be the same again.

BUT ON THE OTHER HAND…….

Somebody once said that he had always wanted to meet a one armed economist who would thus be unable, having given a prognosis, to say "but on the other hand…" followed by a second, completely, opposite prognosis. Recently every prediction of an imminent major fall in house prices by economic gurus has been trumpeted in banner headlines across the media to such an extent that a self fulfilling prophecy may be created. But on the other hand…. more sanguine prognoses from more level headed journalists deride the doom gurus whilst welcoming the more sustainable housing market with increased interest rates but without a major crash.

Ian Cowie writing in the Telegraph "Don't be sure the property boom has ended" – notes that due to a change in the law from April 2006 pension funds can be invested in residential property for the first time and this could inject a massive amount of demand on money into the housing market. Lewis Bessemer, also in the Telegraph asked "Crash what Crash?" and points out that in 2003 tabloid newspapers used banner headlines such as "House prices set to crash" no less than eleven times and traces other gloomy predictions back to 1998. He also opines that the yardsticks of a drop in mortgage approvals and an increase in the amount of property for sale are not necessarily a pointer for lower house prices.

The Nationwide has also opined that prices could rise up to 5% in 2004 but it is indicative of media house price coverage that this pronouncement was ignored by the tabloids and in The Times was buried deep in the business section rather than in their "Bricks and Mortar" property supplement published on the very same day.

FPD Savills say that the current soltering in the housing market is a blip due to negative sentiment and indeed we have seen such "blips" before caused by the slump in the Far East stock markets a few years ago and the Gulf War last year. It may just be that winter has come early to the housing market this year. Some are already saying that interest rates have peaked and may fall next year and in Eastern Daily Press the general manager of the Norwich and Peterborough building society even predicts that East Anglia will "buck the trend" of any slowdown.

This theme was taken up by an article in The Scotsman, (never a race noted for its cheery optimism!) where the doom and gloom tabloid headlines occasioned by Nationwide's .4% fall last month are queried on the grounds that there is no such thing as an average house only a vast array of areas, niches and house types all subject to very local influences which affect their value. This notion is quantified in Street, the magazine of the Forex market which points out that recently reported falls in house prices actually represents a fall of 1.5% in terrace and semi detached houses offset by a rise of .7% in detached houses.

And how to define affordability? The price/earnings ratio has always been a moveable feast dependent on interest rates and in an era of low rates, should perhaps be consigned to history with other outdated indices such as the trade gap and the gold standard. More and more affordability is expressed by what percentage of income is spent on mortgage repayments. For the record recent interest rate hikes have increased this percentage figure from 14% to 19% . In 1990 the percentage was 40%. It could also be misleading to say that sales activity is down on autumn 2003 when the "Baghdad bounce" meant that most house buying activity was in the second half of 2003 giving an artificial high.

The housing market needed cooling and the Bank of England's action has cooled and it may just be that higher interest rates, far from triggering a crash, have prevented one.

But on the other hand……!