



The Grade II-listed Knapp's Farmhouse in Bampton, near Oxford, was built in three stages over the 14th, 17th and 18th centuries. It is on the market for £350,000. The thatched east end of the house was originally a medieval timber-framed hall

Centuries of growth

An Oxfordshire farmhouse with hidden medieval origins is ripe for restoration, says **Sally Staples**

A few weeks ago Hilda Pickard packed up her possessions and left her beloved Knapp's Farmhouse for the last time. She had celebrated her 90th birthday in the extraordinary house she had fallen in love with nearly half a century ago, but failing health meant she had to move to a nearby nursing home.

The Pickards had come to the Oxfordshire village of Bampton in the Fifties when Hilda's husband, Sidney, a hydraulics engineer, was offered a new job which meant the family had to move from Harrow-on-the-Hill.

"I knew nothing at all about the country but the minute I saw Knapp's I felt I belonged," remembered Mrs Pickard. "I don't believe in spirits or anything like that but it just had this peaceful feeling. I knew we would be happy there and we were."

The Pickards knew little about the history of their home until a medieval specialist contacted them and asked to visit the house. He was writing a book about old houses and close examination showed that

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

Knapp's originated in the 14th century and had gradually been extended over the next 400 years.

The thatched eastern end of the house, which the Pickards have used for storage, was originally built as a timber-framed medieval hall in the 14th century. The soot-blackened beams in the existing roof show that a central fire had burned there 700 years ago.

The present stone walls disguise the remains of the timber frame and the extension westwards was constructed of stone under a slate and thatched roof during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The farmhouse, on the market for £350,000, offers a huge challenge to anyone tempted to restore the medieval part of the property — a millennium project for the stout-hearted.

The rest of this long narrow house is a treasure trove of dark elm beams and floorboards that take the visitor back in time. In the living-



The living room has a beautiful open fireplace with its original hearth and cast-iron grate

room there is an open fireplace with the original hearth, cast-iron grate and canopy.

And two more, as yet uncovered, fireplaces in the dining and sitting rooms offer the dedicated restorer plenty to get stuck into.

Window seats, a flower-filled lean-to conservatory and plenty of light ensure the small rooms are cosy rather than poky. Upstairs some of the floors slope slightly setting the furniture askew and giving the house a charming picture-book quaintness.

The three main double bedrooms all look out onto a pretty south-facing garden, walled on three sides, with a small apple and pear tree orchard and a flourishing vegetable garden bordered by michaelmas daisies. Here Hilda Pickard grew potatoes, sprouts, cabbages and onions ensuring her family had at least three home-grown vegetables for dinner every day.

At the front of the house dozens of red rose bushes push through wrought-iron railings. Although the house faces



The back view of the farmhouse offers an idyllic view of a country cottage-style garden

the road, just opposite the post office, the thick stone walls do as good a job as double glazing in reducing noise levels.

And for those who love building projects the attic has enormous potential. A wooden staircase leads to this empty area that runs the length of the

more modern part of the house with enough space for perhaps two further bedrooms and a second bathroom.

Behind Knapp's, which is Grade II-listed, lives Gerald Read, a retired farmer, who spent his boyhood in the farmhouse when his father worked



Bampton has a 500-year history of Morris Dancing. This picture was taken in 1947

Farm, granted to William Golafre before 1341. In 1608 the farm was leased to Sir Laurence Tanfield, chief baron of the exchequer and remained part of the Aston Manor Estate until it was sold separately, probably in the early 20th century.

The village of Bampton became especially prosperous in the 17th century, when a boom in the leather trade made it famous for the production of jackets and breeches.

It has a population of about 3,000 and is five miles from Witney and seven miles from Burford.

The village has a florist, a hairdresser and just one restaurant. A local builder runs the ironmongery, the butcher offers pig roasts for weddings and parties and there is a small supermarket that villagers claim never closes.

But Bampton is best-known today as the home of Morris Dancing. Every Whit Monday four groups of dancers perform throughout the day.

It is an exceptionally attractive village with the golden Cotswold stone looking its best basking in the autumn sunlight. And there is a thriving sense of community.

As well as its half-dozen pubs, Bampton has a market square, a village hall and a gallery where the West Oxfordshire Art Association regularly exhibits.

One of its members, Ailsa Matheson, has lived in the village for 15 years after moving from Oxford.

"The contrast here was just delightful," she says. "People would stop and say 'hello' and ask what you were doing in your garden. It is a very friendly place and a very active one too."

"We have a day centre, a gardening club, a literature group and the local drama group is putting on a millennium revue. A group of local people are raising money to get a bike path built between the village and the Thames. People do not sit back in this village."

● Agent: FPD Savills (01865 269000)

SUZANNE HUBBARD