

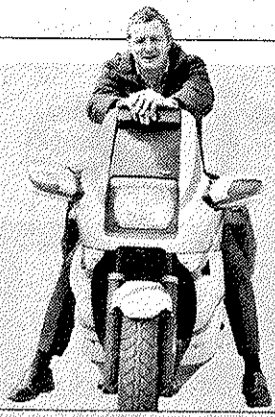
London property

**RETURNED TO
SPLENDOUR**

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AGENT PROVOCATEUR

It's the fleeing of the 19,000, moans Ed Mead, as the C Charge rears its ugly head (again)

THERE are, allegedly, about 19,000 car owners that our esteemed Mayor is proposing to fleece in his review of the Congestion Charge, which now mysteriously seems to be turning into a witch-hunt against anyone choosing to drive the car they want. The line between Congestion Charge and the emissions tax is now very blurred and of course that's just what the Mayor's office wants.

The entire flawed premise of road tax is another issue, and the choice of a 225 gm/cm³ arbitrary, but it's there. Nineteen thousand... it's about one side of Old Trafford, or the number of different ways Starbucks can serve you a coffee.

Not many really, is it? But it's enough to prompt/goad local government officers into action. Some 19,000 people are going to have to pay the enhanced £25 per day charge, regardless of whether they're residents or not as he's abolishing that discount too for owners of bigger cars.

I wonder what Ken suggests people do, then. Buy a big car that just happens to swallow all their kids, dogs and luggage, but that has a weedy engine incapable of doing the job and will blow up under the stress of moving about outside London?

Extraordinarily, he might not have gathered (after all he doesn't drive, let's not forget) that people who have bigger cars in London actually do go into the countryside, and often.

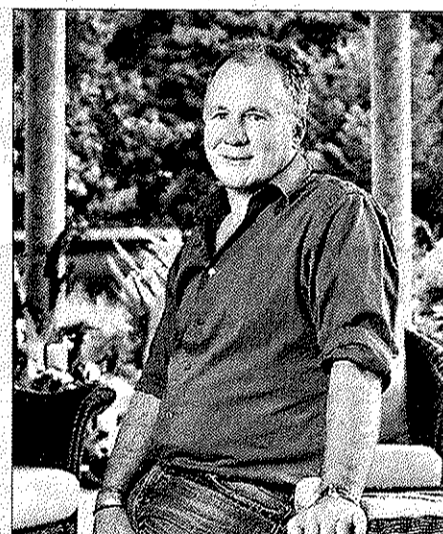
I'm not defending the madness that is the 4pm pick-up from school with assorted luxu-barges which annoyingly has probably led to this envy-driven proposal. But why should the majority who pick a car because of their needs be forced to pay an extra £6,000 per year merely because an arrogant few can't help but annoy locals?

If Ken can show me a half-decent car that'll easily fit in a large family with all luggage and pets for a weekend away - and that has an engine producing less than his own limit - I'll gladly print a retraction.

● Ed Mead is an estate agent with 30 years experience: ed-mead.com

HAVE YOUR SAY

Do you have a solution for Ed? telegraph.co.uk/property



Fit for a Duke: (from above, clockwise), the loggia, which came from Venice; the gardens at the back of the house; the formal sitting-room; the minstrels' gallery; the view from the master bedroom; owner Paul Crowther; the cinema room

How to restore an 18th-century marvel

Bought by his great-great-grandfather, Paul Crowther's family home was used as offices for most of the last

SYON Lodge in Isleworth, near Twickenham, is, according to the brochure, "one of the most important Grade II* listed houses in west London". It's undoubtedly the most impressive house in the area, which is almost entirely down to the Herculean efforts that its owner, Paul Crowther, has put into the property's restoration.

The house was the Dower House to Syon House, built by architect Robert Adam for the Second Duke of Northumberland in 1770. During the last century, for almost 80 years up until 1997, it was the head office of Crowthers of Syon Lodge - an internationally renowned architectural antiques company, which specialised in huge pieces - because it had the luxury of having enough space to store large period fireplaces, enormous statuary and panelling.



What front: the Grade II* listed house seen from the road

One part of the property is a magnificent four-storey Georgian house with 12 stone steps up to the black front door. To the left is a low-built building, which would have been the stables and carriage house with hayloft cover. "The building was bought by my great-great-grandfather in 1927," says Paul, who lived there until he was

five before moving to East Sheen. He left school early to work in the family business, but didn't see eye-to-eye with his father and left to start up his own business, the 21st Century Group. But he missed the house. "I loved it when I worked at Syon Lodge," he says. "I loved the house and loved the job. I travelled around the world buying and selling antiques, it was wonderful."

Because of the family differences, he instead built up his own property

company and stayed away from Syon Lodge until three years ago, when his father gave up the business.

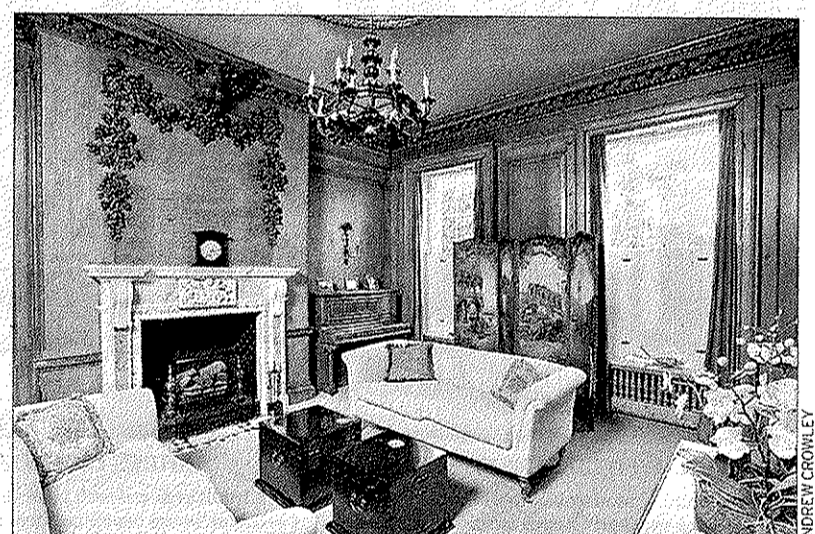
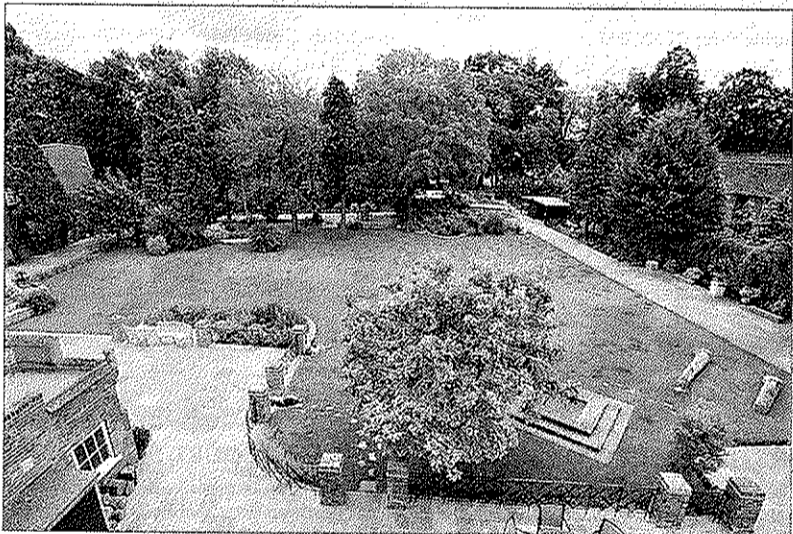
"It used to be the biggest architectural antique company in the world, but it got smaller and smaller, and then my father sold some of the land off for new townhouses and apartments to be built where the warehouses for the panelling used to be," says Paul.

When he learnt that the area behind the Lodge was on the market for further development, he decided to buy the property and has since spent millions of pounds returning it to the very fine house it once was.

"It was a complete mess when I bought it. The York stone all around the house was cracked or broken. There was 1,800 square metres of stone, some about a foot thick, so I employed four young guys for 18 months just to repair it all," he says.

He has also made a very beautiful rear garden complete with two water features, large rockery and a wide path all around the perimeter of the lawn.

'I DON'T WANT IT TO LOOK TOO PERFECT. IT'S AN OLD HOUSE, AFTER ALL, AND IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE ONE'



ANDREW CROWLEY

- large-screen plasma TV and all

century. But after taking 20 desks out of the banqueting room, the owner set about its total restoration. **Mary Wilson** took the tour

Also at the rear of the house is a very impressive loggia, which originally came from Venice. "That was exactly the sort of thing the company dealt in," says Paul. When he took over the property, the loggia was so dirty that he couldn't even make out what colour the marble columns were, but now it has been restored to its original soft terracotta hue. He's put a plasma television screen out there "so you can watch the football outside in the summer" and, to hide a gap in the wall between Syon Lodge and the new townhouses, he's erected a painting of a Venetian scene.

As the building had been used as offices for the last 40 years, things had been chopped and changed with little thought given to the architecture. Surface-mounted cables were everywhere, damp had just been covered up and period cornicing and flooring damaged with little thought of its worth.

"People said to me, 'why don't you just give it a lick of paint and carpet it?' But I wanted to do things properly," says Paul.

And he has, bringing the period house into the 21st century without ruining its heritage.

"When I took it over it had 20 desks in the ground floor reception room and it was horrible," he says. "It used to be full of tapestries and swords."

The room, which was the old stables, was converted by putting in 17th-century dark linfold Jacobean panelling taken from a monastery, a minstrel's gallery and wide oak flooring. At one end of the room is a massive 16th-century stone fireplace carved to show St. George and the Dragon, which Paul has left charred. He has also left some of the smaller cracks and faded painting on the original panelling. "I didn't want it to look too perfect. It's an old house and should look like one," he says.

Most of the original features in the main house were left *in situ*, but Paul had to repair and restore many of them, including all the windows, floorboards, panelling and the cornices. He also put in new drains, electrics, plumbing and a sophisticated lighting, entertainment

and security system.

One of the most impressive rooms is the formal drawing-room on the first floor, which has wood panelling and intricate carving above the large marble fireplace in the style of Grinling Gibbons.

Beside this room is a cinema-room, where Paul has put in a projector screen which comes down over a large picture showing what the loggia used to look like in its heyday.

Because he wanted to keep the period feel of the house, the large kitchen/breakfast room, which he has made out of two rooms, is far from the glossy, state-of-the-art kitchen he might put into one of his own developments. Instead, it is in a country style with an Aga and wooden work surfaces, though it still has all the up-to-date features you would expect in a modern kitchen.

Paul admits to having spent copiously on architects and has had to go through 11 different planning applications.

"One of the many planning battles was to fill in the large wrought iron gate

in the middle of the wall to one side of the front of the house. But the planners said the gate, which was only put in in 1985, had to stay."

Sadly, Paul Crowther has decided to put Syon Lodge on the market. With his Polish girlfriend, Beata, he has a nine-month-old son, Oliver, but it's a very big house for three people to rumble around in and it's cost him a fortune to get it to the magnificent state it is now in.

"I really don't want to sell it," he says ruefully. "Maybe I'll try to let it instead."

Contact Syon Lodge, with eight bedrooms, 10 reception rooms, six bathrooms and over an acre of grounds, is on the market for £6.95 million. Knight Frank (020 7591 8600) and Featherstone Leigh (020 8940 1575) are the agents.

**'PEOPLE SAID:
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GALLERY

For more pictures of Syon Lodge go to telegraph.co.uk/property

