



A MOVING STORY

Roger Wheeler contemplates a change of scenery...

"I am bored with this road' he said, "shall we sell the house and move?"

I had lived in the house for 23 years, he only eight, but I gave the suggestion a moment's thought and said "Okay, let's, why not!"

It quickly became apparent that it was a great idea, choosing a home together, somewhere that we both liked. It's not a decision that you really should make on impulse, but in fact on reflection it wasn't that impulsive, as I too had become tired of the neighbourhood. Despite the fact that it is, roughly, 40% gay and several well meaning people are trying to engender a community spirit, it was time to seek pastures new – easy, or so we thought.

It had been at least two decades since I put my toe in Brighton's rather murky property pool. Many things have changed, although estate agents are still the same charming, sharp suited, good looking, personable rogues that they always were. Today we have the internet, all properties that are for sale are on one of the two major sites, so do we really need estate agents? Well not really but they are so ingrained into our psyche that we automatically rush into their open arms when we think about moving house.

You can almost see the pound signs in their eyes when they queue to value your home. "This is one of the most sought after addresses in Brighton" they pronounce, (where isn't I wondered), "this road is positively Islington-on-Sea, we'll sell this house in a matter of days, no problem." It's all too exciting, I had to have a cup of

tea, (well okay a large gin), when he told me the very minimum sum that we should expect.

"This is the perfect time to sell, the markets are very active, this house will present no problems," we were told. We will obviously be moving to a large detached house set in rolling parkland. Or maybe not.

And so we're on the market, let the fun begin. Putting your home up for inspection by strangers is a very strange experience, but believing in presentation we spent hours tidying up and cleaning those little nooks and crannies that hadn't seen a duster for ages.

Viewings were slow to start with but soon picked up and it quickly became apparent that the vast majority of prospective buyers are women, not a man in sight. Without exception they all wanted to install a new kitchen and bathroom, although there is nothing much wrong with either that a fresh coat of paint would not put right.

Then we had several with two or more children and needed at least three bedrooms; we have a two bedroom house, why are they wasting everyone's time? But still they come; none have enough money or hadn't sold their existing home. Everyone wants to live in "the most popular road in Brighton" but want to pay the price of an out of town bungalow. There are plenty of great properties at very reasonable prices in the outer suburbs of Saltdean, Woodingdean and Patcham, but none in Islington-on-Sea.

All this was quite a revelation, the 'expert's' opinion seems to have been just a little exaggerated or perhaps it wasn't. A quick search proved that we were not asking above the average, so what is the problem? The agents were on the case. Reduce the price was the answer as far as they were concerned. Obviously, if you want to sell something quickly have a special offer. They, the estate agents, needless to say, want a sale to get their hands on their 1.5% commission, which could result in a very tasty £5,000. We did feel somewhat bullied by constantly being told that we must reduce the price when the same people had told us what the price should be. We resisted these regular comments being quite determined to accept the original advice and stick to our guns.

All this is fine but are there any houses that we would like to buy? The answer in short is a resounding no. The few houses we actually liked were way out of our, quite respectable, budget. The few we did see were perfectly presentable but all needed, in our opinion, improvements. So we were in a way hoist with our own petard. In other words we wanted to change other people's properties as much as others wanted to change ours, this is the way of the world. We decided not to waste people's time by looking at houses when we hadn't sold ours; that doesn't appear to deter prospective purchasers though.

The next phase in the dog eat dog world of estate agents is that soon after we had started the process we had several contacts from rival agents wanting to sell the house. The big mistake we had appeared to make was to give the original charming young man exclusive or sole agency which meant that we were tied to them for many weeks... too many weeks. When signing the contract I had failed to spot this clause, so I hurriedly called and amended this excessive period but still felt just a little conned. But where was the problem, they were going to sell the house in a matter of minutes.

Four months later and still no one wants to buy our bijou town house. As we don't actually have to sell we've decided to stop, take it off the market, paint all the rooms dazzling white or at least a tasteful shade thereof and try again next year. Although several 'experts' had told us that we need not redecorate as the new owners would invariably want to decorate it in their own taste. All this has been a salutatory experience, the moral being don't believe what the experts tell you, stick to your guns and have patience, lots of it.

Watch this space, the year is young and we are told that the market is really picking up, which it is if you believe what you're told.

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