

On track for 1st class life

Pictures: SAM ATKINS

MOST PEOPLE have a patio outside their French windows or patio doors. But Lizanne Southworth has a railway platform instead. "This," she says, pointing at her decking, "is where the steam trains used to pull in."

Lizanne, her engineer husband David and their two children – Victoria, 16, and Alastair, 13 – have an unusual home in rural Yorkshire: a restored railway station on the now defunct Derwent Valley Light Railway, which ran between Layerthorpe in York and Cliffe Common near Selby. Called Skipwith Station, the Southworths' property was once the penultimate stop on the line. "Our entrance hall used to be the ladies' waiting room," explains Lizanne, "and our lounge was the ticket master's office. And over there," she says, pointing in the general direction of her sofa, "was the main door leading into the general waiting room... and a little window where you would buy your ticket."

The Derwent Valley Light Railway is all but forgotten now. Just 16 miles long, it opened in 1912 but passenger services stopped in 1926 (the line finally closed in 1985). Skipwith Station was later turned into a home by previous owners but when David and Lizanne first saw the house

It's not the end of the line for this old station as TONY GREENWAY meets the family who have made it their home

in 2004 it looked more like a Seventies bungalow than an architectural marvel from the era of steam.

Inside, the building's distinctive tongue-and-groove had been covered with plasterboard and the wooden exterior was hidden under concrete. "Previous owners couldn't get a mortgage on a wooden house, so the outside had been breeze-blocked and rendered," says Lizanne.

"There were clues that gave away its origins. It was raised above the ground and it had big gables with finials on the end, so we knew there was a fine historical building underneath."

Lizanne and David bought the station – and its three acres of land – for £350,000, moved in in 2005 and began work on the interior immediately. "We gutted the place. We knocked out walls, replastered, installed underfloor heating, moved the kitchen and uncovered the internal wood panelling," adds Lizanne.

They also chipped away the rendering and ripped off the

breeze blocks to reveal the station's beautiful wooden exterior. Then, inspired by a group of York train enthusiasts who had restored an old station down the line, the Southworths painted the outside green and yellow – much as it would have been in 1912.

The Southworths also bought two train carriages for £1,000 each which they placed on their land, converted and now rent out as self-catering holiday homes.

Altogether, Lizanne and David estimate they have spent £150,000 on the renovations (including the carriages) and recently had the property valued at about £500,000.

"I love it here," says Lizanne, a garden designer by trade. "I really enjoy living in a place that has such character and history. I also feel we have rescued something from the local area, that was on the verge of disappearing. The local historical society think the work we have done is fabulous, as do the York train enthusiasts whose station inspired us."

"Plus, locals want to stay in our carriages for long weekends and we have had interest from older people who remember the station as it was. We have had guests with children who have really enjoyed the experience of staying in a train at an old railway station. It's different and it's fun."

● www.skipwithstation.co.uk



MIND THE GAP: Lizanne Southworth, above, Skipwith Station in the Twenties, left, and one of her converted railway carriages, below

