



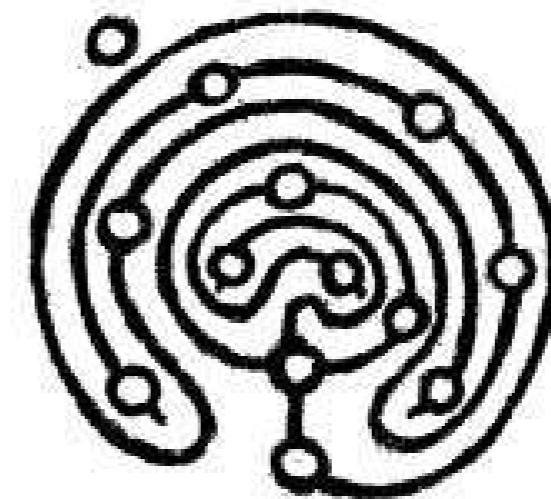
THE
Calliston
GRIMOIRE



*The Magical Guidebook
to Britain's Most
Extraordinary Home*

JOHN TARROW

THE
Calliston
GRIMOIRE



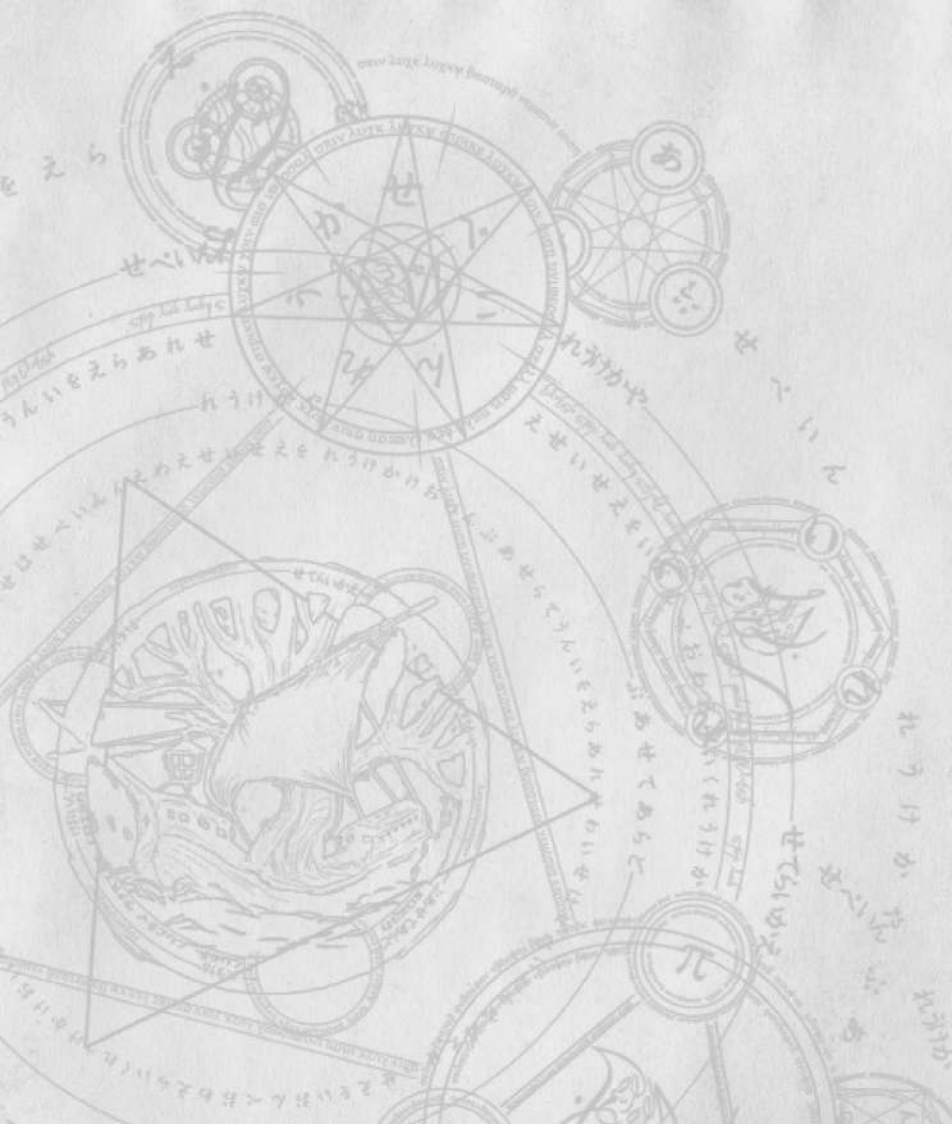
*The Magical Guidebook
to Britain's Most
Extraordinary Home*

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GRIMOIRE

BEING A GREAT AND ARCANÉ WORK OF ANTIQUITY AND STRANGENESS, ENCOMPASSING THE THIRTEEN ROOMS, DOORS & MOONS AND THE SPELLS, SORCERY & WIZARDRY THAT BROUGHT THE HOUSE & GARDENS INTO BEING, AND IN WHICH ARE REVEALED THE SECRET MYSTERIES OF MAGICAL LIVING FOR A LIFE OF HEALTH, HAPPINESS & HARMONY.



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FOR MY FATHER, RON,
WHO TAUGHT ME TO ACHIEVE





— EMBRACE ALL
FOLLOW NONE —

可





O INITIATION

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY, AND THE WRITING OF THIS GRIMOIRE. ABOUT ITS AUTHOR & CREATOR, HIS NAMES AND BIRDS, AND THE START OF THE QUARTER-CENTURY JOURNEY TO TRANSFORM THE UNITED KINGDOM'S MOST ORDINARY HOUSE INTO BRITAIN'S MOST EXTRAORDINARY HOME.

PREVIOUS PAGE

© Gregg McNeill \ Darkbox Images.

This image of John Tarrow was created using the same chemistry and techniques the Victorians used in the 1850s. The Underwood Wholeplate Tailboard camera used was from the 1880s. It was purchased by Gregg McNeill in a camera store in Leeds and restored to working condition. The Scovill Morrison Petzval lens used is from the 1870s.



A MOST HUMBLE WELCOME, STRANGER

*AN INTRODUCTION TO THIS WORK, EXPLORING
HOW & WHY THE HOUSE EXISTS, AND OF ITS
AUTHOR & THE FIRST STEP OF THE JOURNEY*

There are those who walk in this world, and there are those that walk in the other world, but this is a story of those who walk in both worlds, those who travel between the light and the dark, and of their mysterious purposes. Their land is the place you've seen only in your dreams; the land of the lost and the free. The place where Death never treads - the place between. It is the place of once upon a time.

You see, certain places, like certain people, seem not to be a part of the here and now, they seem to be beyond. From the realm of nowhere and everywhere all at once. They exist at all times and all places, dwelling like shadows of history. They say imagination is the lock and belief is the key.

BETWEEN WORLDS
These words form Pandoro's
opening address from *The
Cautionary Tales of Dreams
& Darkness* play in *The
Talliston Chronicles* novels.

A WHOLE NEW WORD
 To perfectly describe the house and gardens I invented the term, *Reantasy*; a portmanteau constructed by combining the words 'reality' and 'fantasy'.

MY DEAR GUEST

Welcome to the *Talliston Grimoire*, the magical guidebook to Britain's Most Extraordinary Home. This is a treasury of the lore, myth and magic of Talliston, how it was conceived and the incredible 25-year journey to create the extraordinary within the ordinary. I would like to personally welcome you on that journey and invite you to use this book to discover more about the house, its principles and lifestyle. The concept was simple: to take a


TALLISTON IS NOT A FANTASY, THOUGH NEITHER IS IT ENTIRELY REALITY

standard British dwelling in an ordinary street, in an ordinary town, and then... Well, perhaps it's not that simple after all.

Growing up in London I realised quite early on that the houses I wanted to live in and the house I could afford were very far apart. So I took the one and built inside it the other. Yet though Talliston is a state of geography, it is also a state of mind. It is a place of imagination and delight. Somewhere priceless, stateless and timeless. Somewhere truly magical. The quintessence of the house is more than how it looks. It is also how it sounds, smells, tastes and feels. Talliston is not a fantasy, though neither is it entirely reality. It has a foot planted in both worlds. It is bricks and mortar, myth and legend all at once. This is my answer to the central question: "What is life?" For me, the key to that life is to live in both worlds, and to appreciate the necessities of both. It is a liminal realm created when we read a real book about an unreal place. It is a space between: the place of enchantment. Talliston's outward ordinariness is its magic, showing the immense importance and affect of our environment upon us. In short: I took the house and life I was given and transformed them into the world I wanted.

Someone once said Talliston is what happens when a man who believes in true love and wild adventure buys a three-bedroomed semi in Essex, but actually it's almost impossible to capture what Talliston represents, and I'm left gathering quotes from others. In a letter in 1851 Charlotte Brontë wrote of the Great Exhibition: "Its grandeur does not consist in one thing, but in the unique assemblage of all things. Whatever human industry has created you find here... it seems as if only magic could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the earth". To me, Talliston is just such a thing. It is magic and I its wizard summoner. It will always be a home for me and is my life. Because as it was being constructed, I came to realise I am not a writer or builder or interior designer: I am a storyteller. It is the telling of stories that is at the heart of my ability - my Shadowmagick: the ultimate power of belief. For without the story - without belief - I am nothing. Only through the power of visualisation and vocalisation will magic become real. The meeting of thought and action. Of dark into light. Lead into gold. And a blatant disregard for time and money.

So I invite you to step into these pages and discover a little more about the house, its history, design and collected objects - and hopefully an insight and understanding into why everything happened. So let's go beyond the garden gate in search of the secret that lies within.


 Author, creator & wizard of Talliston

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR

In 1990, 25-year-old East End boy John Tode bought the UK's most ordinary house; a three-bedroom, semi-detached ex-council property in Essex. At midday on Saturday 6th October Tode moved into No. 51 Newton Green having arrived in a VW Beetle with everything he owned in the world on the back seat. Adopting his journalist pseudonym John Trevillian, he spent a quarter of a century working with 138 artists, artisans and volunteers transforming the house and gardens into 'Britain's Most Extraordinary Home' (*The Times*). Exactly 25 years after beginning, at midday on Tuesday 6th October 2015, the house and gardens were completed. As author John Tarrow, he wrote *The Stranger's Guide to Talliston*, the fantasy adventure fictionalising that amazing journey. Then, after a span of 30 years working and living inside this unique and inspirational project, upon his 55th birthday on Saturday 18th January 2020, he gave the house and everything in it to the Talliston Fellowship and left just as he had arrived: in a VW Beetle with everything he owned in the world on the back seat. This book charts that journey.

John Edward Tode was born to parents Jean and Ronald Tode on 18th January 1965 in London's East End. His early life found within him a love of stories and writing and he spent his childhood with a Smith Corona Calypso typewriter and a wild imagination, both of which he still owns. Inspired by swords and sorcery, he became captivated by ancient and medieval history and through channels such as *Dungeons & Dragons* and the Far Isles Medieval Society, he studied Celtic poetry, song and story - forming the persona of Huan Caius Mereddin, an exiled bard living in an abandoned tower in Wales. Adopting the raven as his totem bird, and moving both physically and spiritually far from his urban origins, he began to make his plans for taking the life he was given and forging it into a life he wanted. With no formal building or interior design training, using just the power of his own

LIFE CHRONOLOGY

YEARS 1-25

John Edward Tode
 18 January 1965-18 January 1990
 Persona | Bard [Huan Caius Mereddin]
 Bird totem | Raven
 Life phase | Knowing

YEARS 25-50

John Edward Trevillian
 18 January 1990-18 January 2015
 Persona | Shaman [Antony R. Kane]
 Bird totem | Eagle
 Life phase | Doing

YEARS 50-75

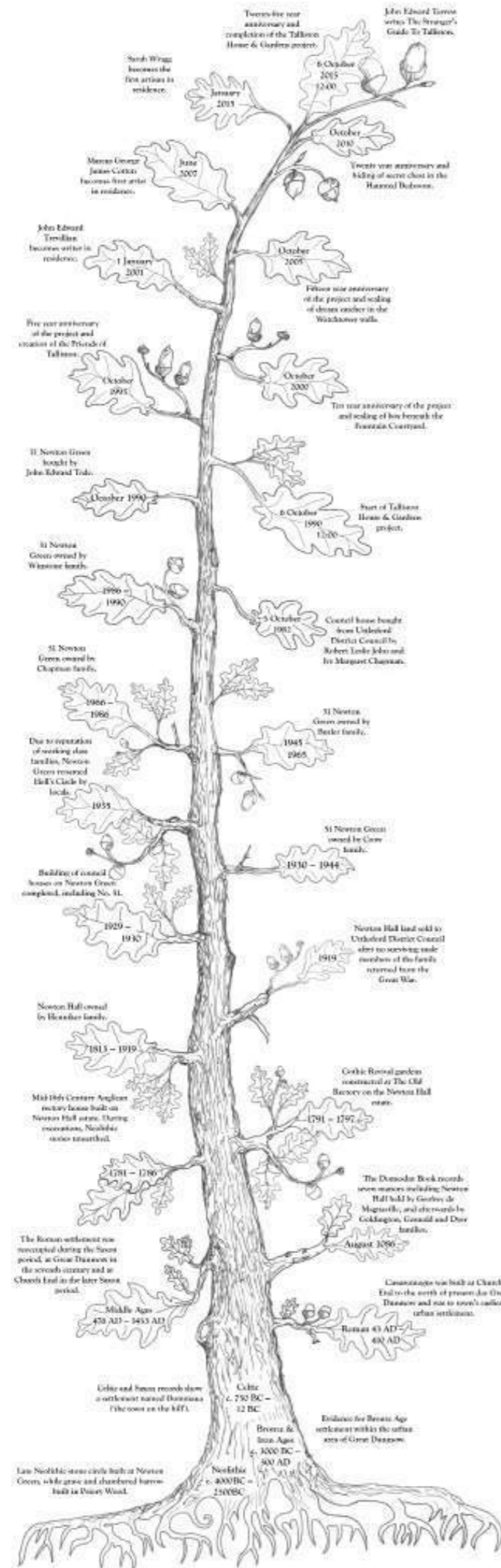
John Edward Tarrow
 18 January 2015-18 January 2040
 Persona | Wizard [Nirromelhe]
 Bird totem | Snowy Owl
 Life phase | Being



TALLISTON HAS A FOOT PLANTED IN BOTH WORLDS. IT IS BRICKS AND MORTAR, MYTH AND LEGEND, ALL AT ONCE

imagination, Tode began to create a world that truly reflected the life that he wanted to live and all the places he wanted to live in. Divorcing himself from the constraints of time, place and money, he began each room with a question of how he wanted to feel in that space, looking through the magnolia walls and beyond the cramped dimensions into far larger worlds. And in finding the house he also found himself.

ABOUT THE STORY
 John is not a writer, interior designer nor builder, he is a storyteller. His books are story in word. Talliston is story in architecture.



BEFORE THERE WAS TALLISTON

INTRODUCING NO. 51 NEWTON GREEN,
INCLUDING A BRIEF HISTORY OF ESSEX &
THE MARKET TOWN OF GREAT DUNMOW

Britain is a land of story with mythologies running deep through its earth, sea and sky, and the perfect setting for an extraordinary house and gardens that wears its real and imagined histories like masquerade garb thrown over otherwise ordinary clothes. This is the fertile ground into which the idea of the house and gardens has been planted, that acorn seed that grew into the mighty oak that we step inside today. So travel back with me now to the ancient past of Essex, to explore the time before the existence of the thing that is called Talliston, charting the great expanse of time from its earliest prehistory to the very day I drove up outside in my VW Beetle with everything I owned in the whole world on the back seat.



TALLISTON. LIFE REIMAGINED
Once an ordinary house on an ordinary street, No. 51 Newton Green has been transformed into 'Britain's Most Extraordinary Home' (The Times).

Illustration by S. N. Davey ARB.
Reproduced from *The Talliston Architectural Room Plans*.

PREHISTORIC ESSEX

The Stone, Bronze and Iron ages of prehistoric Essex span back almost a million years and cover vast developments in society, culture and technology. This is the time before written records, the true age of story. Through the power of oral lore, transference of legend, song and ancestral knowledge birthed folktales, verse and spoken prose. The earliest Palaeolithic settlers in Essex could have arrived when Britain was still joined to continental Europe. Evidence of those first people have been found scattered along the river valleys of today's Essex, where the climate was favourable and water plentiful. The sea in palaeolithic times would have been much lower than the present level, suggesting any encampments would now lie deep and inaccessible in the coastal sediment. By the Neolithic period around 4000 BC, early humans moved from a nomadic life as hunter-gatherers and began to settle into farming communities. Essex was a fertile place for arable life stock such as sheep, goats, cows and pigs, and crops of wheat and barley. Clearing forests saw the rise in axe production, while the need to store grain created larger and better pottery.

In the house's imagined history a stone circle was raised upon a circular portion of land to the west of a Neolithic settlement, aligned to the spring and summer equinox. Known as Israen-Tôr, the site extended to a burial chamber called the Necromanteion to the west. Here abide three sisters - mother, maiden and crone - known simply as 'The Three'. Both malevolent and benevolent, these wise women are shaman guides and skinwalkers, able to transform into animals to seek knowledge and guidance.

THE BLACK WYCH

Fáe-Anu (*animal + ancestor*) is guardian of all that dwells within the Earth in the Infinite Ocean of the Past and mother of the Black House of the Ghúil. She represents the heart and loins and her veins run with blood and urine. She embodies the teaching Know Thyself and her preferred form is a wolf. She keeps the secrets of the Necromanteion, the ancestors and the Dead.

THE GREY WYCH

Jór-Rúna (*horse + mighty strength*) is guardian of all that dwells upon the Earth in the Eternal Forest of the Present and mother of the Grey House of the Wych. She represents the body and her veins run with sweat. She embodies the teaching Trust Thyself and her preferred form is a hare. She holds the threads that weave the many-coloured web of all worlds.

THE RED WYCH

Ása-Gyða (*god + warlike*) is guardian of all that dwells without the Earth in the Immortal Sky of the Future and mother of the Red House of the Maje. She represents the soul and head and her veins run with eternal spirit and tears. She embodies the teaching Be Thyself and her preferred form is a white stag. She is the keeper of the many rooms. While the power of the Maje is within, the Ghúil without, only the Wych know the power of Nature, the magic that is neither within nor without.

ROMAN ESSEX | AD 43-C.410

Before the arrival of the Romans, the land now called Essex was ruled by the Celtic Trinovantes tribe. Britain's Roman era began in AD 43 with a full-scale invasion by emperor Claudius after an earlier failed attempt by Julius Caesar. This led to Camulodunum (Colchester) becoming the capital of Roman Britain. While there is evidence for a Bronze Age settlement upon the site of the town, Great Dunmow's first recorded urban

development dates to this period. A small town developed at the junction between Stane Street, the Roman road that linked St. Albans to Colchester, and other tributary roads from Sudbury to London and Cambridge to Chelmsford. Coins and small urns found in Great Dunmow show the sites of two settlements; one on the main Roman road; the other on the banks of the River Chelmer at present-day Church End. The Romans occupied Britain for almost four centuries before finally returning to defend Rome from its own invaders leaving behind thousands of abandoned villas, viaducts and Hadrian's famous wall.



EARLY MEDIEVAL ESSEX | C.410-1066

The Dark Ages between the end of Roman rule and the Norman Conquest at the Battle of Hastings were extremely turbulent. During this period Anglo-Saxons, Germanic tribes and Vikings from Scandinavia all arrived to seek out the fertile land and riches of Britain. This is also the time when both Essex and Dunmow came by their present-day titles. The name 'Essex' derives from the Kingdom of the East Seaxe or Kingdom of Essex founded by Aescwine in AD 527, a realm occupying territory to the north of the River Thames and east of the River Lea.

In AD 825 Essex became part of the Kingdom of Wessex and was later ceded under the Treaty of Wedmore to the Danelaw under the Kingdom of East Anglia. In AD 991 the Battle of Maldon resulted in complete defeat of the Anglo-Saxons by the Vikings. From this chaos came forth the Kingdom of England, and Great Dunmow was recorded as 'Dommaua'. Celtic or Saxon 'dun' means 'down' or 'hill', and 'mow' means meadow, so the name of Dunmow is literally 'the meadow on the hill'.



MEDIEVAL ESSEX | 1066-1485

Duke William of Normandy's resounding triumph over King Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 marked the dawn of a new era, and the overthrow of the Saxon kingdom of England heralded the start of Norman rule. This began a period of great change, revolt, civil war and devastating plague. In the *Domesday Book* of 1086, seven manors are recorded as part of the Dunmow Hundred; that in which the town is situated is called the Manor of Great

FROM PREHISTORY TO THE DAY I DROVE UP IN MY VW BEETLE WITH EVERYTHING I OWNED IN THE WHOLE WORLD ON THE BACK SEAT

Dunmow; the others are called: Merks; Newton Hall (held in demesne by Geoffrey de Mandeville); Shingle Hall, or Olaves; Martells, now Martins; Alferestune, or Bigods; and Southall, or Suffe Hall. In 1104 began the Dunmow Flicht Trials, a unique annual event that awarded a flicht of bacon (essentially half a pig cut sideways) to married couples who could satisfy a panel of judges that over a period of a year and a day they have not wished

THE TALLIS STONE
The earthfast stone at the head of the labyrinth garden is the oldest object in the house. Dated circa 30,000 years old, this Cornish granite stone is from the early Neolithic period.



© Illustration by Jon Harris

TALLISTON MAPPED
 The coordinates of the house and gardens are:
 Latitude 51°N 52' 26.34"
 Longitude 0°N 21' 14.25"

themselves unmarried. Great Dunmow was granted its Market Charter in 1253 and the focus of the settlement moved from Church End to the High Street and Market Place. When reimagining Great Dunmow at the end of this period for the novels, the manors were renamed as: The Manor of Dunmow; Alsenham, Thremhall Priory and Priory Wood; The Manor of East Stone; The Manor of Canfelda; Newton Hall and Witchcross Mede; Alferestun; and Briars End and Forest of Hatfield.

FOUNDED BY AESCWIN IN AD 527, THE NAME 'ESSEX' DERIVES FROM THE LONGER TITLE OF 'KINGDOM OF THE EAST SEAXE'

TUDOR & ELIZABETHAN ESSEX | 1485-1603

The Tudor dynasty began with Henry VII's victory against Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. With the Wars of the Roses ended, the country settled into the reigns of three generations of monarchs. In 1527 a new Dunmow church was built and included on the subscribers' list was chief landowner Kinwollmersh of Newton Hall, along with several clergy and tradesmen. Great Dunmow became a borough by letters patent of Philip and Mary, dated the 16th of February 1555 and confirmed by Queen Elizabeth in her 32nd year (1590). During the Reformation, two Dunmow locals were martyred for their faith: Thomas Bowyer in 1556 and Anne Higham Line in 1601.

In the house's imagined history the stone circle is now named Witchcross Mede, a place of judgement and trials against those accused of the infernal arts of witchcraft and wizardry. All hangings and burnings took place within the stone circle. Part of the estate of Newton Hall, the site sits on the mile-long carriage way from the lodge to the manor. More than 760 Essex men and women were accused of being, or consorting with witches. Many were found not guilty, but many others were hanged or more often died in prison. In Great Dunmow the accused were recorded as: 1567 Alice Prestmarye; 1578 & 1579 Joan Prestmary; 1579 Richard Prestmary; 1592 Agnes Draper; 1592 Anne Scott; 1592 Audrea Mathewe; 1594 Audrea Mathewe; 1602 Thomas Maund; and, 1675 Elizabeth Gynn.

STUART ESSEX | 1603-1714

The Stuart period began when James IV of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth who had died childless in 1603 and brought together the two long-warring nations of England and Scotland. James Stuart became the first monarch to reign over the entirety of the British Isles. In 1625 James was succeeded by his son, Charles I, whose reign would see the three kingdoms plagued by a series of civil wars. Stemming from conflict between Charles I and Parliament, the English Civil War raged from 1642 until 1651, spreading throughout England, Scotland and Ireland. Parliament's Roundheads faced up against Charles I's Royalists, resulting in hundreds of thousands being killed, wounded and bereaved over the war's nine year span. During the English Civil War, Dunmow mainly supported Oliver Cromwell while in 1662 local gentry welcomed King Charles II to the Hundred. In Essex, English Heritage's Audley End House is all that survives of the magnificent mansion house that was built there by Thomas Howard, First Earl of

Suffolk, between 1605 and 1614. Audley End was one of the greatest houses of early 17th-century England. Built on the scale of a royal palace, the impressive house seen today is only about a third the size of the original.



GEORGIAN ESSEX | 1714-1837

The Georgian age is named after the first four Hanovarian kings, all called George, who succeeded Queen Anne in 1714. This was a time of great expansion to the British Empire and the establishing of Britain as the world's first industrialised nation. The Georgian era also saw the emergence of sea bathing resulting in much growth of Essex seaside towns and resorts. The first pier at Southend was a wooden jetty opened in 1830 and extended in 1834, while Walton-on-the-Naze also saw much development with Marine Parade and the Crescent in place by 1832. In 1784 in Dunmow Lionel Lukin tested the first unsinkable lifeboat on the Doctor's Pond.



VICTORIAN ESSEX | 1837-1901

Queen Victoria's long and legendary 60-year reign saw the British Empire acquire unprecedented power and wealth. In Essex the arrival of the railway brought its own rapid growth. By 1843 the Eastern Counties Railway had connected Bishopsgate station in London with Brentwood and Colchester and later further expanded to the holiday resorts of Southend, Clacton and Frinton-on-Sea. During this period the Dunmow Flich Trials were revived in 1855 by English historical novelist Harrison Ainsworth and

THE DUNMOW HUNDRED
 The origin of the term 'hundred' is obscure, either thought to describe 100 plots of peasant farmland or an area that provided 100 men at arms sworn to serve the army of the king.



© Illustration by M.G.J. Cotton.



THE BUILDING OF THE HOUSE & GARDENS

*CONCERNING THE INTERIOR DESIGN ALCHEMY
USED IN THE TRANSMUTATION OF THE
BASE HOUSE OF LEAD INTO A GOLDEN HOME*

The concepts, design, philosophy, mythology and all the myriad elements that constitute the house and gardens did not arrive fully formed in one muse-sent thunderbolt. Like any epic odyssey or fantasy call to adventure, it all began with a single step. Instead everything grew from the tiniest acorn of an idea. That seed of a thought was to create the space I wanted inside the space I owned.

Because in a nutshell, I wasn't happy with the world I had been born into, but felt it was far too big a project to change that world. So I decided to change *my* world. To accept those things I could not easily affect or alter, and have the courage, patience and dedication to set about transforming the one thing I could: my three-bed semi in Essex.

*FANTASY VS
REALITY
Talliston is not about
living in a fantasy. It is
about transforming reality.
Neither world is enough. It
is about walking in both.*

*FROM ORDINARY TO
EXTRAORDINARY
The places we live in are
the people we become.
So, change your world.*

This is why it is so difficult to answer the question of what Talliston truly is. Is it a mystery waiting to be solved? A house of my innermost dreams and nightmares? A memory palace of times and places connected to some ancestral consciousness? Or just a cool house and gardens to play within? It is all of the above - and more. The architectural style is Storybook. The period is Reantasy. Yet in 1990, when it became necessary to start conceiving the first of each of the thirteen rooms of Talliston, my mind's eye was

I HAD NO EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD. MY EXCLUSIVE VIEW OF OTHER LANDS WAS THE ANNUAL CAMPING TRIP TO CORNWALL

woefully inadequate. Answering questions such as “What would be my perfect place to write?” and “Where and when in the world would you want Sunday morning breakfast?” just didn’t bring back tangible - or indeed accurate - replies. While I answered the first by embracing my love of 1920s and 1930s noir films, the questions that followed were far, far trickier.

Still, I had spent those summers on the Cornish coast indulging my wild imagination. I had years of practice in dreaming up exotic locations and situations, both real and fantastical, for my story characters to live in: so now it was time to let these spill from inside my head and out onto the pages of my everyday life. Moving into Newton Green - or more importantly, away from my parental home - gave me the freedom to travel beyond the United Kingdom’s borders. And so began my journey and journals that would eventually bring more than 2,000 objects back from twenty-seven countries into this ex-council house in Essex.



THE FIRST STEP

I had no experience of the world. My exclusive view of ‘other lands’ was the annual family camping trip to St. Austell in Cornwall. This took place on the first two weeks in August every year for eleven years in a row. From age four to fifteen, rain or shine, we packed my father’s current vehicle, hitched the trailer and set off for the south west. Our annual adventure began while my brother and I were still sleeping, usually around three in the morning, allowing passage across central London and well into our long journey before we awoke and became a nuisance. The rest of the time I spent my life within the ring of the M25; albeit imaginary until October 1986.

In that year, after a messy redundancy and near-unbelievable payout of £3,000, I got my first chance to travel. I chose California as the USA was a dream destination back then, and I had longed for visiting Disneyland since I was seven. My first travel journal is just a glorified itinerary of things seen and done, places travelled and the strangeness of American culture and people. It has none of the insight and understanding of later writings. But more, as thrilling as that fly-drive was, with all its culture shocks and hilarious *Englishman Abroad* antics, where back then I was content to pretend to sail the *Zambezi* on an animatronic jungle cruise: now I have canoed the real thing. It is this transition, from dream to fantasy to reality, that mirrors the journey of the creation of the house and one that I would encourage everyone to pursue. From my 2009 journal covering a visit to Nepal and

Architectural plans © Sam N. Dewey RIBA.



Tibet I wrote: “Wisdom is found through the feet. To travel, to experience the wide open places, to gaze upon a blaze of golden sunset upon the crown of the Himalayas, to walk with cultures and faiths and people of unfamiliar creeds - this is the way to wisdom”.

*FRONT ELEVATION
Showing hedge and gated
portal. From 1:500 scale
architectural plans of the
house & gardens.*

By travelling, by bartering for market goods and trinkets, by enquiring about hoodoo practices firsthand in Bayou St. John, I found a greater acceptance of world cultures and people. Travel also brought a deeper understanding of myself and my own journey and led me to years of study and research that eventually informed the Talliston rooms and the imagined occupants that inhabited them. And, in a wonderful circuitous route, it inspired the novelisation of the house and gardens - taking the entire project back onto the page and from there off into other people’s imaginations.



ESCAPING THE ORDINARY

Once upon a time (actually at midday on 6th October 1990), I stepped into a three-bedroomed, semi-detached, ex-council house in Essex and started a personal journey that grew into a twenty-five year project: to take a standard English dwelling and transform it into a wonderland of inspirational locations, each set in a different time and place. The process to deconstruct each room back to the brickwork and rebuild from scratch, so that upon completion not one square centimetre of the original house remained (either inside and out) took every penny I had earned, over 35,000 hours (a conservative estimate) and brought thousands of items from 27 different countries (all personally visited) into this little house. Using only



FRONT ELEVATION
Showing sunken garden and stone circle. From 1:500 scale architectural plans of the house & gardens.

those tradesmen essential to compliance with building regulations (structural, electric and gas), the rest of the skills (from carpentry, bricklaying and garden landscaping to the more esoteric like basket weaving, gold leafing and treehouse construction) have been learned during its lifecycle. Throughout the project, I've also welcomed 138 artisans, artists, architects and volunteers who became immersed into what is now the Talliston community. It was quite a brave undertaking, but made more so because the person who started this quarter-century journey - ie. me - could back then not even wire a household plug. It has been an oft-repeated supposition that the only reason I began this endeavour was because my lack of knowledge meant I had not the faintest of idea how impossible the task ahead actually was!

If there is one inquiry that crops up among the endless rounds of 'What do the neighbour's think?' and 'Who does all the dusting?', it is the question of: 'Why?' This is a difficult one as it seems to assume that there's a reason to art. I mean, why did Leonardo da Vinci paint the Mona Lisa? But art does have a message, and here I can help a little. If the project says anything it is that the extraordinary lies within the ordinary - that we can all achieve anything our mind's imagine. But I wasn't sure that this was a completely satisfactory answer. And then I was on a plane to New York and found myself

watching Edward Norton and Naomi Watts in *The Painted Veil* (a story of a doctor swapping aspidistras and velvet drapes for the cholera-infested backwaters in 1920s China). In the opening, while Naomi was explaining how she dislikes being given cut flowers (as why would anyone give her dead things), there was the same question: why place so much effort into something that is going to die? Why squander so many countless hours on something I am going to lose? Why spend so much time? So much money? And for what purpose?

It is the question that I have asked myself many times, and know what I'm really asking is: "What is life?" Everyone should ask themselves this question, and know that there are no wrong answers, that everyone will respond differently. What matters is not what the answer is but that the question is asked. For me, it is not why is Talliston like this, but why isn't all the world like Talliston. What's so strange about trying to create a life that is wonderful, that is magnificent and excellent, before the time comes when I must say my farewells? Why place so much effort? Why cut flowers, why scent each area, why travel hundreds of thousands of miles to fetch objects for the house... Why? Here is the why. The what and the how. Because that, to me, is life. And after finishing Talliston, life has never felt more rich, more wonderful - or for me - so alive. Here also are the answers to some other commonly-asked questions from the tours.

FAVOURITE ROOM

There are two answers to this, as it depends on how you frame the question in your mind. The favourite in terms of achievement is The Haunted Bedroom, as the woodwork and construction, the plasterwork and fabrics

were easily the most complex of the rooms. In terms of the location I love the most it is The Office as I have written several novels in this space and embodies my feeling of escape that Talliston represents to so many people.

MOST PRECIOUS OBJECT

The first object that I bought that still resides in the house is a pottery wizard in blue clothing and grey hat carrying a spellbook. It was one of only a handful I brought from my parents' house into Talliston at the beginning of the project and still own. I must also mention my daily journal that includes entries for every one of the 9,132 days spent constructing the house and gardens.

MY PERSONAL BESTS

When I bought the house my world travel had consisted almost entirely within the bounds of the British Isles, with a large proportion of those being summer holidays spent in Cornwall. Now I have extensively travelled outside the UK and around the globe. Of all the countries and places, here are my personal highlights:

- Best Overall Country: Italy
- Most Extraordinary Country: Tibet
- Best City: New York, USA
- Best Restaurant: The Witchery, Edinburgh
- Best Location: Monteriggioni, Tuscany, Italy
- Best Hotel: Chateau Marmont, Sunset Strip, Los Angeles, USA.



THE LIFE OF A ROOM

Transforming a room at Talliston is a fairly lengthy and immensely costly enterprise that allows little room for error. Go down the wrong path and precious time and money is wasted - and both were in very short supply. Though the original 25-year timescale may seem generous, the shortest span spent building a room comes out around the two-and-a-half year mark, with a price tag to match. So, forward planning and budget management are crucial, yet not at the expense of allowing a sense of freedom to explore possibilities and encourage ideas. This is why I created the Talliston room lifecycle. A way to approach each unique space in a creative and managed way. Here follows is an overview of the five distinct phases of each location at Talliston. I rarely got to fully focus on one particular room; most of the time I was moving through a variety of separate stages for multiple rooms, especially swapping outside for inside in the constant juggle with the unpredictable English weather.

PHASE I | DREAM

The Visionary

Imagining a Moment in Time & Place

Without thought of budget or time scales, the first step is to create the what, where and story the location is to encompass. To do this I approach the room emotionally, rather than practically, trying to find that moment or

THE MISSION

1. **TASK:** To take an ordinary house (three-bedroomed, semi-detached, ex-council house in Essex) and transform it into an extraordinary labyrinth of locations from different times and places, so that not a single square centimetre of the original house remains, while:

- keeping the orientation and use of the original rooms
- only adding those elements that a typical council-bought house would contain (conservatory, kitchen extension, garden shed, etc.)
- utilising only those tradesmen and craftspeople required by law or necessity, with all other work accomplished by core team and volunteers.

2. **TIME:** Exactly twenty-five years, starting at midday on 6th October 1990 and finishing at midday on 6th October 2015.

3. **COST:** To do so without any outside funding over and above the time and finances of ordinary people.

Ultimately the placing of the finished building into trust while also creating a creative community, *The Talliston Fellowship*, a non-profit group created to preserve and maintain the house, gardens and inventory.



AMARANTHINE

In a world that does nothing but change, Talliston was created as place that does not. It is conceived of a place both timeless and eternal.

Architectural plans © Sam N. Dewey RIBA.

feeling that informs as to the time and place, occupant or even first object from which all other ideas and associations flow. So The Voodoo Kitchen posed the question: "Where in the world would you like to eat Sunday morning breakfast?" and all the easy sense of relaxation that comes with it. For The Cabin it was more about the feeling of being in the middle of the wilderness rather than ten paces from the main house. Dreaming without judgement or self-criticism is a great habit to engender in everyday life. At this point we get to live, breathe and experience the room before lifting a single finger to create it. The persona for this phase is the Visionary, one who can see beyond the common, the ordinary, and the expectations that surround them and into the great realm of possibilities of what could be. They strive to be creative, innovative, and often have colourful personalities.

THE TWENTY-SEVEN COUNTRIES

A list of the twenty-seven countries I visited during the quarter century of conceiving and building the house. These were not the only countries or places I visited in that time frame, but these were journeys exclusively house-related.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Belgium | 15 Morocco |
| 2 British Isles (England, Scotland, Wales & Ireland) | 16 Nepal |
| 3 Cambodia | 17 The Netherlands |
| 4 Canada | 18 Norway |
| 5 Czechia | 19 Poland |
| 6 Croatia | 20 Portugal |
| 7 Denmark | 21 Romania |
| 8 Egypt | 22 South Africa (Malawi, Zambia & Zimbabwe) |
| 9 France | 23 Spain |
| 10 Germany | 24 Sweden |
| 11 Greece | 25 Tibet |
| 12 Grenada | 26 Thailand |
| 13 Italy | 27 United States |
| 14 Japan | |

Being a writer I record my experiences when I visit a new country, some of which were visited several times. The final library consists of forty-two journals representing all my travels made during the years of construction.



*O'UTSIDE VS INSIDE
Within the house and gardens is not how the world is, but instead how I want the world to be.*

experience on par with the lavish Victorian dinner parties of yesteryear, creation of the chapel eating area was made manageable - and achievable. The persona of the Adventurer casts us as embarking on a journey never before undertaken. It is the mindset of expeditions and explorers, and to find adventure in everything we do.

PHASE III | SOURCE

The Inventor

Creating a Place Through Architecture

With the plan in place, sourcing for the project can begin. How many people are required? Are there any specialist skills needed to be learned? Where are the raw materials and items coming from? Realising the room's vision is a very long path, and not all aspects need to or can be decided at the beginning. It is better to focus on the smaller tasks rather than the entire room and all the many things that need doing, buying and building. It is the time to make plans, experiment with options such as colour, sights

PHASE II | DISCOVER

The Adventurer

Exploring the Idea & the World

Once we have the idea, the time comes to discover how we are going to achieve that vision. This is done by creating models, fashioning samples, travelling to potential locations and starting to bring design elements together. Here is the moment for deciding upon budgets, time scales, start collecting designs and really honing the dream into a realistic plan. Mood boards are created to link colours, major objects are located and the time period is researched to begin filling in the gaps, answer questions and flesh out the story we want to tell.

Here is the phase to try to fill in as much detail as we can, map out phases of the project (for example, if it is an outdoor garden, planning across multiple summer months) and starting to decide when would be a good time to visit the real world location. In the case of the dining room, I said that I wanted to go to the local fish shop, bring back some cod and chips, sit at the dining table and feel it was the best dinner I'd ever had. It was about using the setting to enhance the food. By dreaming of a dining

and sounds, to track down and locate key objects and explore avenues until we hit on the right path forwards. The persona of the Inventor focuses us on the role of devising new processes, appliances, machines, or articles and continues to perfect and improve until the final 'Eureka!' moment is achieved.

PHASE IV | FORGE

The Builder

Creating a Time Through Furniture & Fittings

In this stage of the lifecycle we move beyond experimentation and iteration. Now it's time to start constructing each piece of the final vision, bringing together people, tools and materials to create something extraordinary from the ordinary. This is the time to gather, assemble, buy and construct the ultimate room. The persona of the Builder highlights the move from invention to construction, though the cycle of Discover, Source and Forge is pretty constant throughout the project, requiring many iterations to bring the final room into being. Each one feeds the other, and when there is doubt or conflict, we can shift through these three stages before progressing.

PHASE V | COMPLETE

The Wizard

Telling Stories Through Objects

After the building phase comes the time of filling that location with meaningful objects. It is also a phase to perfect, polish, finish and finally release to start elsewhere. After the many iterations of sourcing and building, and with the completed location comes the time when we enter a phase of continuous upkeep and maintenance. Each room is not a static environment; gardens grow, lightbulbs burn out and paint becomes cracked or chipped. Keeping a room fresh and clean requires a lot of planning and house management, though with vintage items, a little dust and wear is good for the overall feeling of being a real location rather than a themed area. The final stage of release is vital and inevitable, and requires planning as to when you are to let your vision go and pass it on to those that will come after you. With Talliston, the journey was to create the final house, not for any specific purpose or intent. Like writing a novel, there comes a time when each of the chapters is written, editing is done and it goes off to be published. The book is printed or produced, and the story is ready to be read by people independent from the author. That is why I knew that one day would come to give the house and gardens away, to pass the vision on to another - and for the house to enter a new phase in its history.

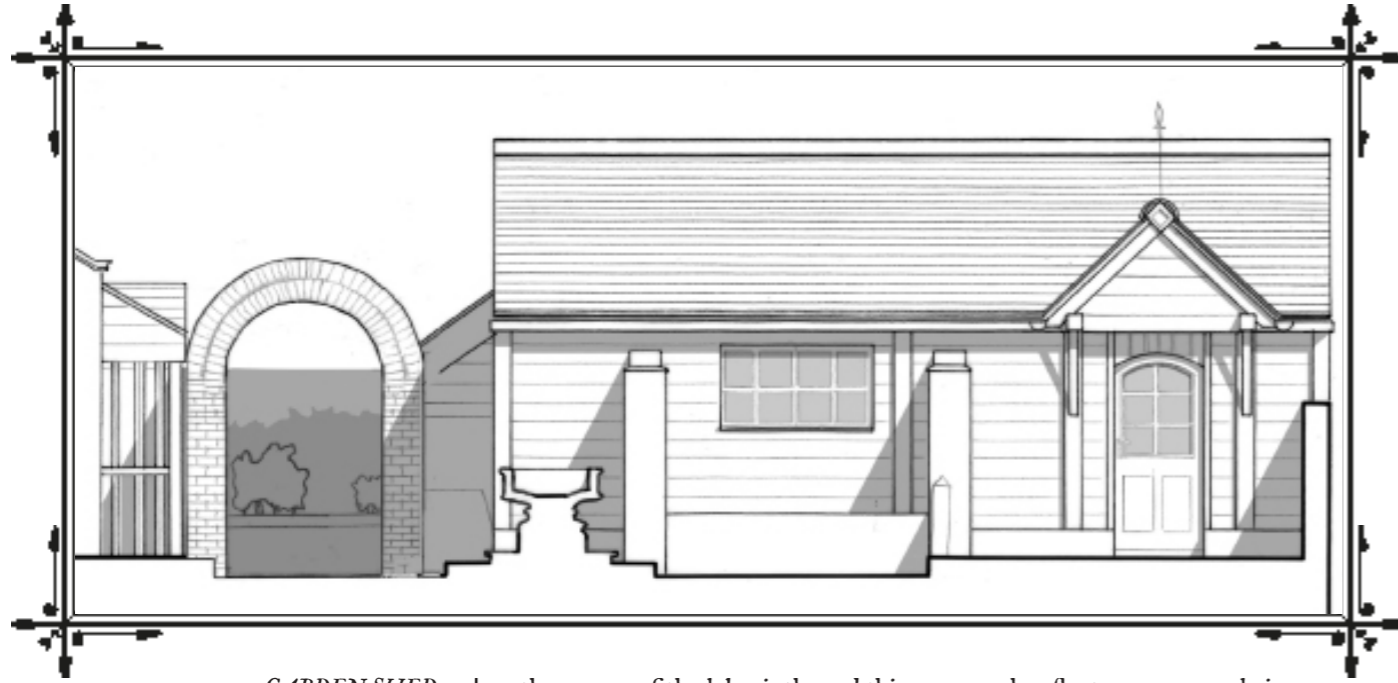


THE FIVE ALWAYS

The Five Always were conceived to be the elemental cornerstones upon which the entire house and gardens are built. Very early on in the concept of the place that would be called Talliston, I gathered the global mythologies to create a new tapestry to weave my world. In the story cycle, by these ways - mirrors, clocks, dreams, nightmares and screams - can evil travel into



*REAR ELEVATION
Showing porch, conservatory and rooftop garden. From 1:500 scale architectural plans of the house & gardens.*



GARDEN SHED ELEVATION
 Showing barn and brick archway. From 1:500 scale architectural plans of the house & gardens.

the rooms of the labyrinth, and this very much reflects my personal views on modern-day living. The simple way then to protect yourself is to do three things: stop all clocks; banish all mirrors; and show no fear when sleeping. The eventual universal design created:

- ✦ The Infinite Ocean of Water | The gate of our reflection
- ✦ The Eternal Forest of Earth | The gate of clocks and time
- ✦ The Immortal Sky of Air | The gate of sleep and dreams
- ✦ The Everlasting Flame of Fire | The gate of fear and nightmares
- ✦ The Deathless Dark of Shadow | The gate of lifeforce and our screams.

THE DEVILRY OF CLOCKS, MIRRORS & MONEY

I started attending Chadwell Junior School in the autumn of 1968. My mother was unable to attend education on a regular basis herself while helping raise six brothers and sisters, so was adamant I would not be so disadvantaged. By the time I started school I found myself in a group of four-year-olds already set apart as I knew the alphabet, could spell and was writing little stories. This feeling of being in some way disconnected with those around me is still something I experience. Money was scarce and things were always being sold to buy new including presents every Christmas. This was also the time we started going camping to Cornwall. Dad owned a Morris Minor and hand made a trailer. We stayed at Bethesda campsite next to Carlyon Bay. It was the start of a ritual ceremony for the next eleven years taken at the same place in the same two weeks in August. One school holiday in the summer of 1969, I broke my arm. Mother was out and Daddy was looking after myself and my brother. Or not as the case may be. I was in the living room with Derek and we were playing around. I was standing on a chair, then I fell. I landed on my right elbow and broke the main bone in two places. I ran out to my father who was in the back garden, my entire arm dangling backwards at an impossible angle. I can still see his face turning white, his expression horrified.

Everything about this episode and the hospital scenes that follow are my first solid memories, including falling from the rocking horse in the children's ward and splitting my plaster cast. Being such a big kid, when they tried to use gas to put me asleep before the operation, it failed to knock me out. I ended up breathing it so long, I ran out of numbers to count up to. Eventually they stuck me with a needle which made me feel like an ox. In the lost weeks from school, I missed the lessons involving basic maths and telling the time. When I returned, there was little attempt

Architectural plans © Sam N. Dewey RIBA.

by the teachers to bring me up to speed with anything I might have missed, so I continued my life without this knowledge. Later this manifested in a frozen panic whenever in a pressure situation involving either of these two disciplines. I also found that I could not tell my left from my right quickly, and had trouble with dates (especially the number parts such as the day of the month and year). Through these series of incidents we begin to see the cause of my borderline hatred for clocks and mirrors. In later life I wrote poetry and songs regarding these strange phenomena. I refer to my ideal dwelling place as "a time behind the clock, a world beyond the glass". I begin to postulate the notion that everything wrong with the world we live in is due to the evil triumvirate of mirrors, time and money.

A TIME BEHIND THE CLOCK

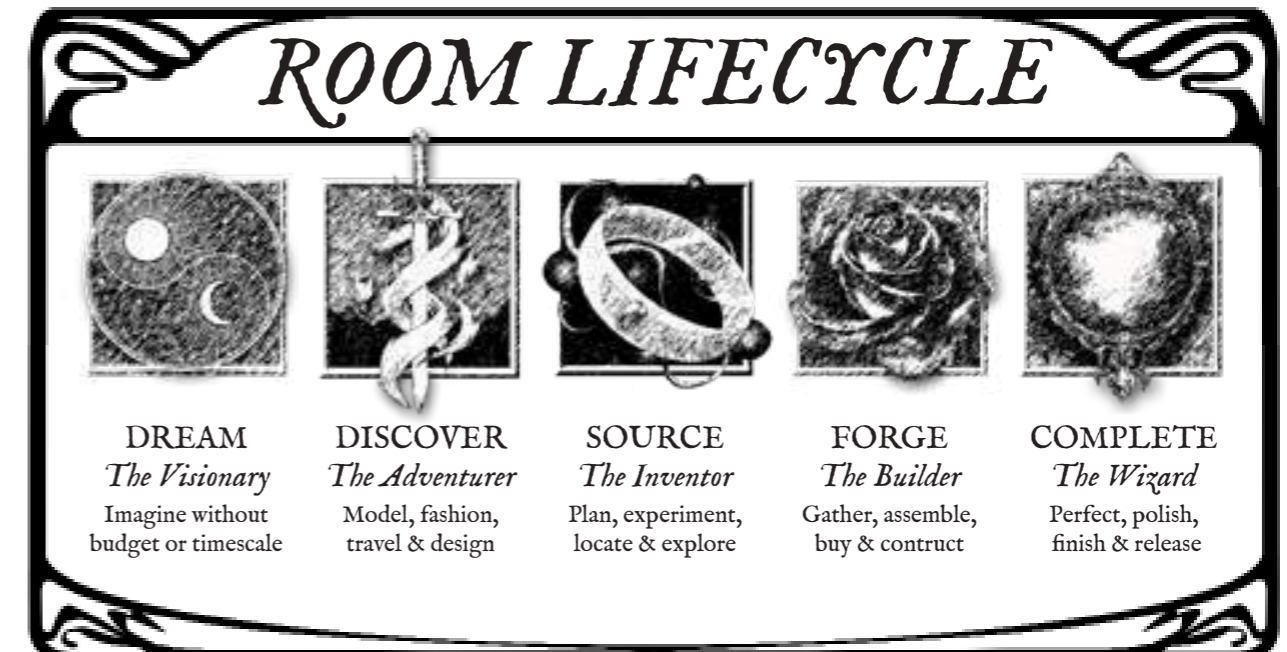
From the very beginning, Talliston has been created with a lot of thought regarding the aspect of time. When I stepped into the house at midday on 6th October 1990, the idea of finding the right representation for each room meant this concept was at the very heart of the project. I have termed this 'the moment' and it is exactly that; it's that moment in time and space that we want you to experience when you enter the location.

So as well as deciding what to add to these spaces, there is also a lot of talk and planning about what to leave out. Clocks were one of the aspects removed, along with others such as mirrors and a television that reintroduce the sense of timelessness to the interior. Essentially, the project was all about creating a place where time has no power. And perhaps also that while every man's home is his castle, I wanted to show that it could also be his office, temple and wilderness retreat; a place to escape, reflect and share. To do this, certain aspects of modern life had to be lost. As American writer and Nobel Prize laureate William Faulkner said, "Only when the clock stops does time come to life".

A brief look online shows an impressive list of people who have found a life beyond the governance of clocks, watches and, to a certain extent, time. It's a great exercise to live for one day without looking at a clock or knowing what the time it is. One such experiment saw all the clocks at AOL's UK headquarters removed for an entire day. Workers were stripped of wristwatches, and time displays on computers and telephones were taped over. Then staff were told to get on with their work as normal.

HOUSE AS THEATRE
 Originally in Greek theatre the stage was an enchanted space in which reality was suspended and wonderful things could occur. In essence that is what I wanted to achieve in the house.

THE ROOM LIFECYCLE
 The five distinct phases, actions and tasks involved in creating a room within the house and gardens.



STOPPING CLOCKS
 "Only when the clock stops
 does time come to life."
 William Faulkner

The experiment was more than just a piece of fun. Psychologist Averil Leimon, who mingled with the workers, was keen to see how it affected office practice. Quickly people's biological clocks took over - and what's so terrible about eating when we're hungry? For Leimon, the experiment was also about equating time pressure with stress, accounting for a significant portion of sickness leave. "The pressure of time was really what we were looking at. It appeals to an organisation to pick up on time as a measure of

**DO NOT ASK ME WHY IS TALLISTON LIKE THIS.
 ASK YOURSELF INSTEAD, WHY ISN'T THE
 WHOLE WORLD LIKE TALLISTON?**

productivity because quantity of time is easy to measure," said Leimon.

Another story tells of a group of business men vacationing in Bali. They had purchased one of the typical holiday packages from the local travel agency, which of course, had a schedule of events. As they were sitting at an outside patio at the bar, they asked when the entertainment would be starting that evening, to which the hostess replied, "Oh, it will start when it starts". The business men's day was suddenly uncertain as they couldn't count the minutes until the evening's event began. The locals in Bali are famous for not caring much about measuring time, or trying to be on time. They don't care much about it - and they are also extremely happy. The

Architectural plans © Sam N. Davey RIBA.

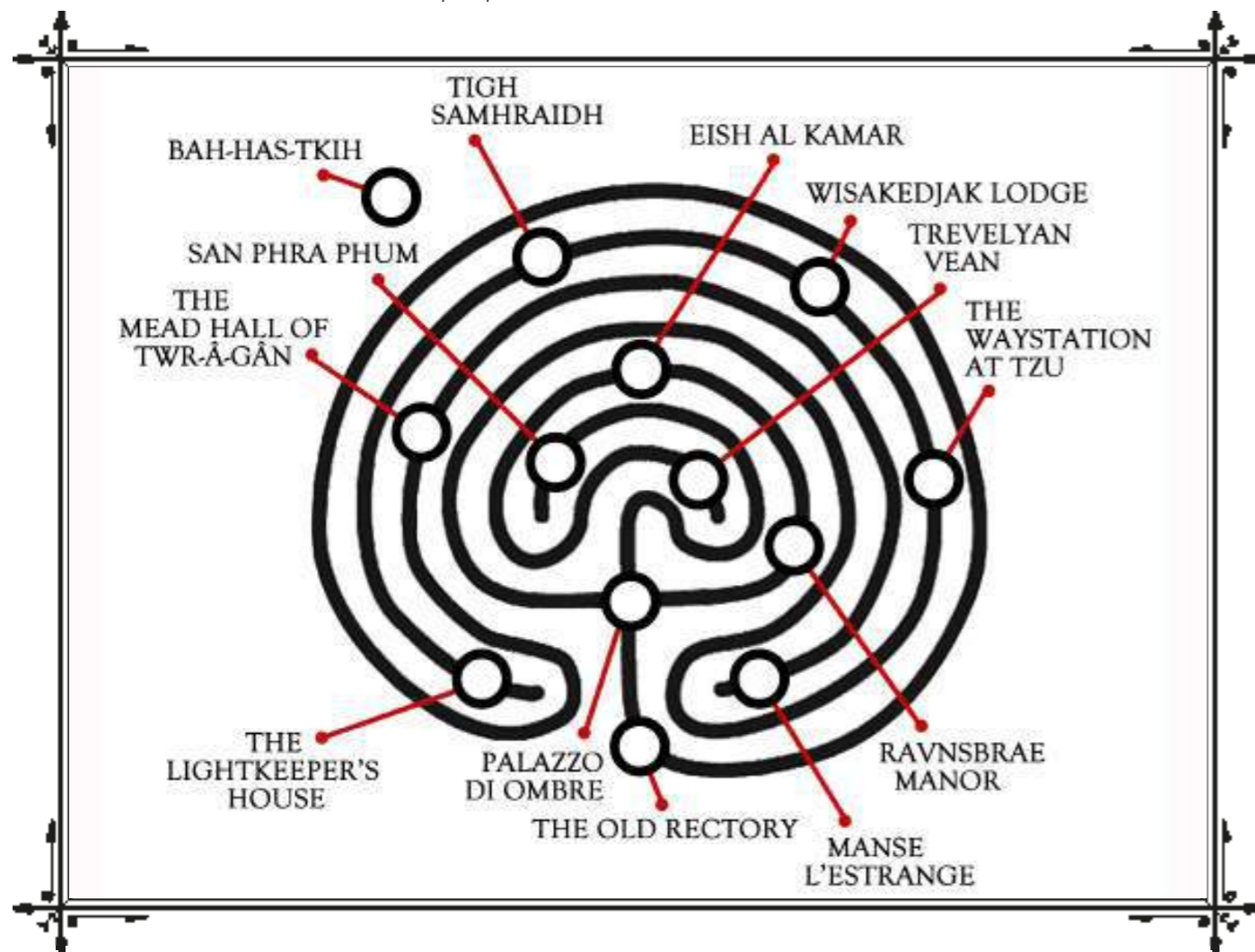
way Talliston sees things, it all comes down to the question of: "What would you rather be? In control, or happy?" To me, the only unit of time that matters is heartbeats. Even if the world were totally silent, even in a dark room covered in five layers of foam, you'd be able to count your own heartbeats. In the workplace there's a movement to focus away from time management in favour of highlighting energy. Jim Loehr, author of *The Power of Full Engagement*, said that "managing energy, not time, is the key to high performance". I have to agree. Trying to constantly manage and monitor my work, leisure time and the house and gardens project only led me to greater anxiety, and always feeling like I'd not 'done enough'. I was always thinking about how I could have 'spent that time more wisely'. But the purpose of life is to enjoy it, is it not? So can't we perform highly without the anxiety of counting every minute? It has long been an interest of mine to create a system of payment at Talliston based entirely on time. Time-based currency exchanges date back to the early nineteenth century while in the US a tax-exempt complementary currency exists in the present day. While such an economy where the unit of exchange is the person-hour works erratically across an entire society, in such a closed world like ours, the idea of being able to pay for events by contributing one's personal time in how our volunteering system works. I also developed three ways to start killing the anxiety of the clock and limiting my dependency upon it.

□ **STAND STILL**

We spend so much time trying to 'go places' and 'arrive' as well as spending a lot of time preparing for things in the future. While this is sometimes a necessary part of life, it's also important to play, to let go, forget the future, and forget the past. What is so important that it cannot wait? It will be there tomorrow. And there will always be more. So relax, and let the world

SIDE ELEVATION
 Showing full length
 of Talliston House &
 Gardens. From 1:500 scale
 architectural plans of the
 house and gardens.





*THE TALLISTON LABYRINTH
Showing the thirteen locations and where they appear on the spiralling path of the labyrinth.*

pass you by. And remember: resting is doing. The natural world shows us clearly how to achieve a successful harvest we cannot keep planting the same ground every year. Fields need to lie fallow before replanting.

□ FLOW

I personally love structuring my work around big, amazing and exciting projects. When I do this, I lay out the action steps and milestones necessary. Then I get to work. But the most awesome thing about working on such projects or writing novels is that you are inviting the flow state. When you're deeply passionate about what you are doing, it's easy to get absorbed in the work and lose track of time. This is where I feel most engaged and alive.

□ WORK BY THE WEEK

This has made a huge difference for me in getting the most important tasks done. Instead of setting tasks for the day, I set them weekly. I've found this helps me better focus on the bigger picture. You may have heard the saying, 'We overestimate what we can do in a day, and underestimate what we can do in a year'. By focusing on the week, I've eliminated this issue.

APPROACHING THE CONCEPT OF TIME

When researching a new room in the house, usually the spark that begins me down the path to finding the right time and place is discovered in a singular object, a photograph or even an emotion. For The Watchtower it was the Mask of Pan. For The Voodoo Kitchen it was 1950s gadgetry. And for the Hall of Mirrors it was a haunting image taken by Thomas Jorion. The photographer roamed Italy, from Piedmont and Lombardy to Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, compiling a gallery series entitled *Forgotten Palaces*. Here in a ghost village (*paesi fantasma*) a once grand staircase lay in ruins, the steps crumbled; its ornate railings covered in dust. On the decaying,

bare walls, the photographs showed a splash of coloured panelling; the last vestige of splendour. Once-great Italian villas such as this would have been home to nobility during the Renaissance - but now many have been abandoned. Seeing how the artist had captured the beauty of decay, I also saw answered how we were going to tell the story of time; a tale that had been systematically removed from each of the other rooms. For the entrance to the house, we needed a way to create the throat of the labyrinth, to fashion a dark narrow area in complete contrast to the outside garden. The idea was to make the transition of that constricting space open out into the connecting rooms that lead from it, making them appear bigger and more expansive. The hall and stairs also acts as a visible river of time that connects many of Talliston's diverse and disparate locations.

There are believed to be more than 300 Italian ghost villages, many dating from medieval times, and this idea of a room that is now derelict was the key to showcasing the themes of time that were so important in the hall and stairs area. We had three representations of the passing of time to focus on: one clock from every room of the house; mirrors lining the walls over the stairs; and, a representation of Saturn, the Roman's Lord of Time. Yet there is also a connection to time with the choice of the occupant. Connecting to the original inspiration this is Romano Drago, an imagined Italian-born photographer and author, best known for his atmospheric black-and-white photographs of abandoned and haunted locations throughout Europe. Made in Greece by a specialist, family-owned company, the bronze mask of Saturn that acts as our oracle in the hall, is cast using the lost-wax technique; the method of oxidisation and patination results in a rich combination of texture and colour which is unique to each piece. Saturn is the Roman god of the Harvest or time of reaping, and named the sixth planet from the sun. He carried a sickle as his symbol and Saturday is named after him. He inspires the modern derivative of Old Father Time. The offerings to this deity are air, water and death, being the three things that time cannot kill.

The naming of the hall and stairs was the next task and so was born the Palazzo di Ombre. It represents the throat of the labyrinth, and distinct from a maze, a hall of mirrors is a room that uses carefully arranged mirrors to confuse the perception of the audience. The most renowned of these is L'Galerie des Glaces, the central gallery of the Palace of Versailles. In this grand hallway, as well as originally in the entire house, many mirrors were used to direct light and confuse passage. For our version an overhead skylight brings both daylight and moonlight into this otherwise enclosed corridor, and also focuses visitors on the passing of time, filled with stopped clocks and a host of motifs all designed to bring the idea of mortality to the viewer. In its near derelict state, this is made even more poignant.

TIME MAGIC

The magic of time is chronomancy, a system of divination to determine advantageous times for action, plus spotlighting lucky and unlucky days for any particular endeavour. In ancient China many fortune telling practices were employed to seek divine guidance from the universe by consulting the inherent powers of its cosmology. Many see such divination as superstitious and primitive, a mere aspect of fortune telling, but for the Chinese this is a deeper tradition, linked to religious practice and view of the inner workings of the universe.

In the world of astrology, the concept of time is central because of the way horoscopes are based on the movements and positions of planets, and how the celestial bodies hold the power to influence an individual's life events. The time of an individual's birth is seen as paramount, with even one second can change a person's luck, opportunities and challenges. Also, time is essential in astrology to understand how these energies affect lives. The personification of time in folklore is Old Father Time, usually depicted as an aged winged man carrying a scythe and hourglass. His origins are found in mythology as both the Greek god Chronos and the Roman god Saturn. Both these deities carry sickles relating to the harvest, while folklore's version has taken on aspects of the Grim Reaper such as the wings and scythe.



BUILDING A BETTER NOW

Entering the house, like entering a wood, alters your sense of time. Moving from room to room you step between past and future, without ever leaving the present.



A WORLD BEYOND THE GLASS

The modern world is itself a hall of mirrors. Wherever we go we are presented with our reflection. From the bathroom to the blank screens of our laptops, in car windows and reflective doors, our image is everywhere. So it is hard to understand that for much of history mirrors were rare and expensive items, impossibly fragile and owned only by the highest members of society. Now they are so common as to be practically unavoidable. Gone are the days when mirrors were made from bronze or obsidian offering only a vague impression of the view. Today our features and flaws are perfectly represented, albeit in reverse. I grew up in a house that was filled with mirrors. Almost every room entered presented you with your reflection. Full length versions were placed in every bedroom and the bathroom had two positioned vertically to infinitely reflect the viewer. For a boy struggling with his weight, unwanted glasses and adolescent pimples, mirrors became a daily psychological strain; an enemy to be best avoided.

Unsurprisingly for objects that hark from such rare and mystical origins, mirror superstitions abound. To the ancients, reflected images commanded a host of mysterious powers. Romans believed their multifarious deities observed our souls through these polished devices, while to the Greeks, souls could be seen in pools of water. It followed that damaging or disrupting a reflection would similarly bring ill fate on the viewer. The idea that seven years bad luck would ensue after breaking a glass mirror can be linked to the third century belief that the body renewed itself over that span of time, thus erasing the ill omen. Hindu mythology mentions magical mirrors. In the epic *Mahabharata* poem, the hero Yudhishtira looks into the future to learn the outcome of a battle. In Egypt's *The Book of the Dead* the deceased use mirrors

in rituals, while in Japan's Shinto religion divine mirrors were placed in shrines to reflect light and symbolised truth. It is believed the soul was a circular disk and a mirror helps us see the true image of ourselves. From these origins a whole vein of divination practices emerged. Catoptromancy was performed by many cultures and used mirrors, reflecting pools or combinations of both to gaze through into other worlds. This concept of mirrors being portals led to the belief that spirits dwelling through the looking glass could attack and steal your wandering soul at night - and gives another reason why mirrors in bedrooms are best avoided. This is also linked to the practice of covering mirrors in a house where someone has died.

LIVING WITHOUT MIRRORS

Though Talliston does have mirrors, their use in the overall décor and design of the rooms is strictly limited. The Boathouse bathroom has standard silver mirrors to assist in morning ablutions. The Hall of Mirrors staircase has antiqued bronzed looking glasses that not only present ever

MIRROR MAGIC

From the magic mirror in fantasy and fairy tales, to Victorian parlour games, the fascination with reflections has a long and intriguing history. The belief that the mirror was a gateway to the past, future and other realms dates back to many cultures. Before glass mirrors, bronze was used and before that polished obsidian. Volcanic glass mirrors have been found throughout the Middle East and Mesoamerica. One of the most enigmatic Tudor artefacts is an Aztec scrying glass, possessed by Queen Elizabeth's astrologer and magician, Sr John Dee.

A mirror can be used to both reveal our reality and to look beyond it into other realms. Staring for too long into a mirror brings about a deformed view of reality, our features and even fantastical and monstrous beings. Being vessels of the soul, mirrors can be used in protection to reflect evil away and binding magic to attach blessings and curses to an individual. In the 19th century, the psychomanteum was a darkened space set aside with a mirror angled to reflect only blackness and was used as a way to communicate with the dead. A candle was placed to be the only light and gazing into the glass brought images from the spirit world. The name for mirror divination is catoptromancy and covers the use of all reflective objects including crystal balls and pools of water to gain insight or make predictions about the future.

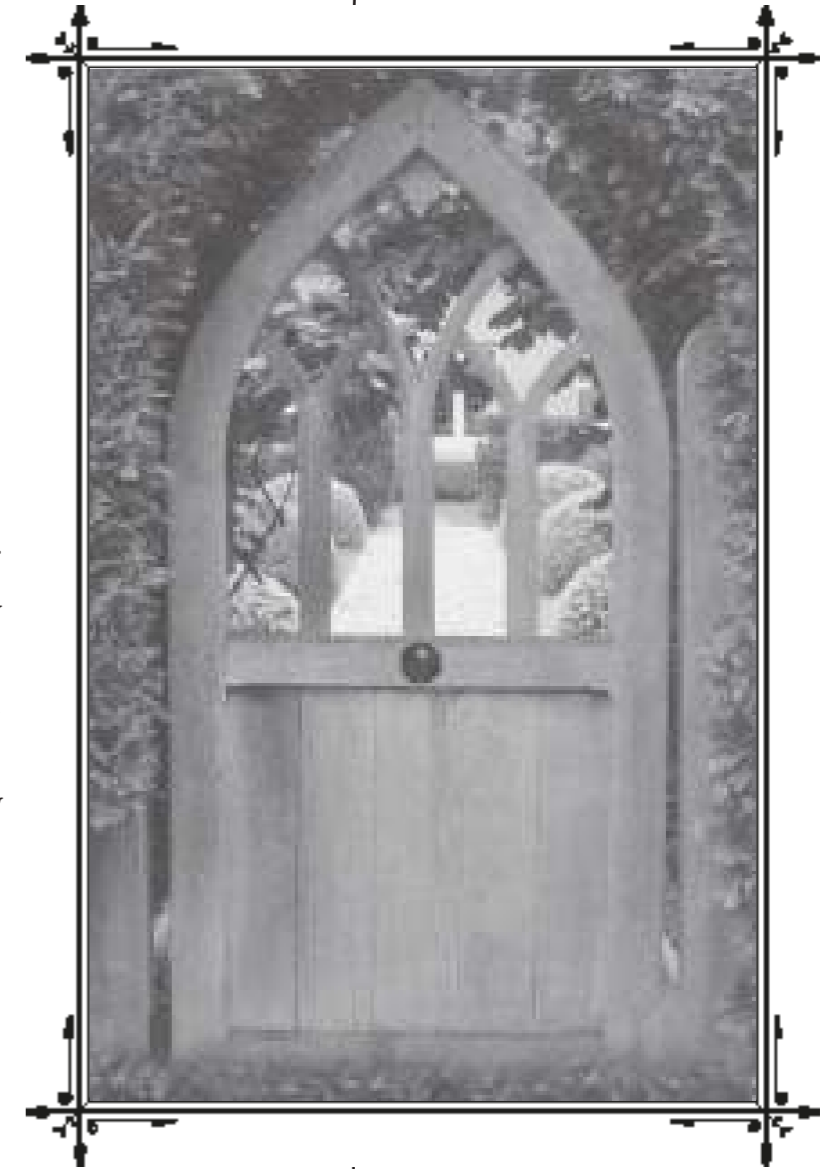


darkening reflections, but also tint the viewer's image to appear more tanned and healthy. The comparison between the two is deliberate and affords the start of a conversation about what truly our mirror-image actually is. What a world without mirrors would be like has always fascinated me. In all aspects of life I want to be focused on what is within rather than what is on the surface; the invisible rather than the visible. A world without mirrors would evaporate the impossible standards of beauty, fitness and self-criticism our daily lives present to us - and shift us to be more interested in inward traits over physical ideals.



FINISHING TALLISTON

Being a writer and author and having a career in magazine publishing and project management means my life has been one of deadlines. Personally I like some kind of time limit, as it's true enough that if my publisher doesn't set one, they are never getting that book. The house and gardens project was a similar exercise. Every journey has to end somewhere, and in this at least Talliston is no different. At precisely twelve-noon on Tuesday 6th October 2015 the project to transform Britain's most ordinary house into the most extraordinary concluded. It was an incredibly strange day, not least because twenty-five years is a long time to be doing anything. For a quarter of a century this journey was a constant in my life, the source of all my aching muscles, empty bank accounts and the reason I travelled outside my front door at all. Once the task of creating the house was finally finished was both a time for celebration and also reflection on how far the journey had taken me. The project was never really about one man transforming a house, but instead about one house transforming everyone it touched. Talliston is not a listed historic location, but an ordinary place that has been infused with magic and wonder. It is just such an incredible example of what can be accomplished with the power of pure imagination. It's my passionate belief that this house become part of the UK's future heritage, a unique example that illustrates how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things, building a place for creativity and keeping alive vanishing crafts. I want it to stand as testament what years of hard work and



*ENTERING TALLISTON
Original previsualisation of the Gothic Revival oak entrance to Talliston. The finished version was crafted by Greenoak Gates, hung between a pair of posts carved by Jonathan Fearnhead.*

