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MOVING STORY SWEEPING CHANGE

A CHIMNEY SWEEP AND HIS WIFE HAD THE GOOD LUCK
TO MOVE TO CORNWALL

Words by **Liz Norbury**, photographs by **Charles Francis**

When a bride is kissed by a chimney sweep on her wedding day, he brings her good luck, or so the legend says. And when the chimney sweep is the bride's new husband, she must surely be a very lucky lady indeed. But even before their wedding, Iain and Melissa Stevens felt blessed by good fortune: less than a year earlier, they had moved from a south London suburb to a delightful Cornish village.

It was Melissa who first spotted the cottage which was to become their home, during a visit to her mother who lives near Penzance. "It just felt right," she says, "especially when I saw that it was called Lowena – Cornish for 'happiness'."

The cottage, a former mine captain's home in St Hilary was a place steeped in history, but with scope for sympathetic modernisation – so it was the perfect project for Iain, who has more than 20 years' experience as a builder. At the time he met Melissa, he was refurbishing old houses. "He soon had me doing plumbing and electrics, and making endless trips to B&Q," she laughs.

Iain had never been to Cornwall before 2007, when he first came with Melissa. "I fell in love with it," he says simply. And when he saw the cottage in St Hilary, he knew he wanted to live there – even though he had spent all his life in London.

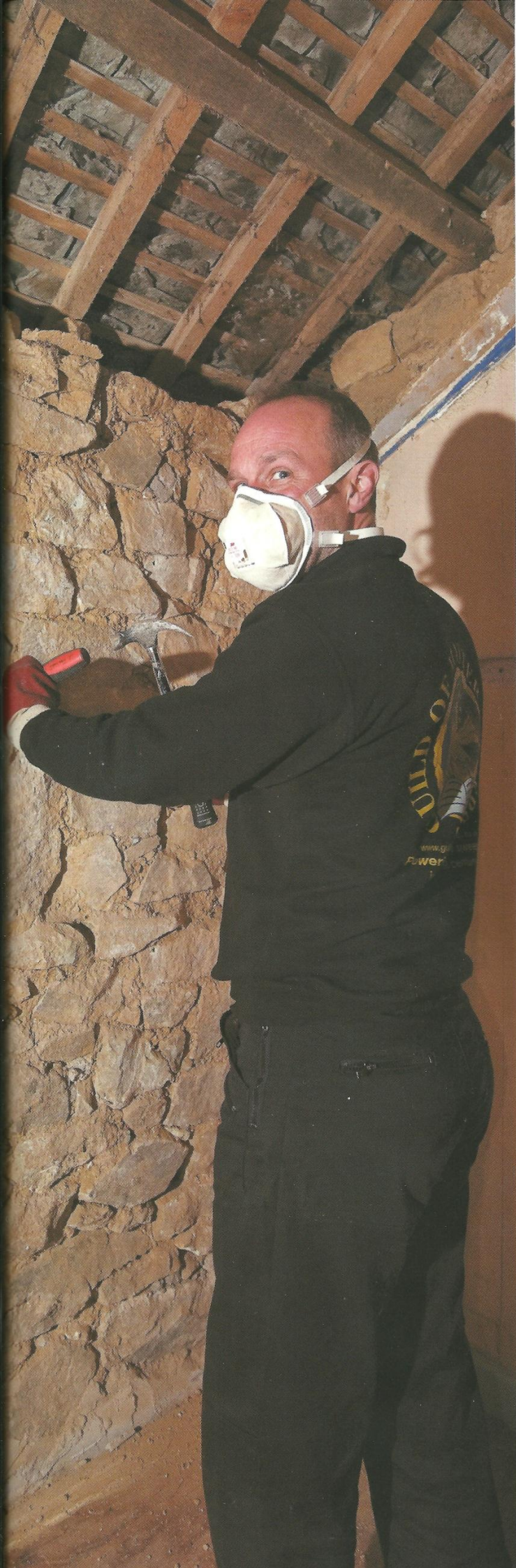
By this time, he had learnt the chimney sweep trade from his brother-in-law. He discovered that there was only one member of the Guild of Master Chimney Sweeps in

Cornwall, so it was an ideal place to set up in business as The Master Sweep. "Down here, there are loads of open fires and more and more people are getting wood-burners," he says. "There's nothing like coming home to a fire on a winter's evening. It's magic. But many people have little awareness of safety issues in connection with chimneys and open fires. I'm the guild's regional officer for the South West, and part of my mission is to get more information out there."

"We've started The Master Sweep TV, which you can find on YouTube. It's just me sitting at the kitchen table and talking about things like how to make sure your wood is dry, testing for carbon monoxide, and how to start a fire. Many people either burn the wrong fuel or use their appliance inefficiently, and they're also unaware of the importance of essential maintenance, not only for safety reasons, but also to save money."

"The solid fuel industry is still largely unregulated, and anyone can set up as a chimney sweep. But many people don't realise that insurance companies require a recognised certificate issued by a registered, bona fide sweep."


Iain and Melissa both have other strings to their bow – or in Iain's case, guitar. He has been singing and playing with Grooveology, a high-level function band for many years. And the couple have both trained in chirokinetic therapy, a method of treatment pioneered by Iain's father, David Stevens, which involves a combination of muscle testing and stimulating pressure points on the head to correct imbalances



in the body. Before she met Iain, Melissa had a busy natural health practice in the New Forest, specialising in Bowen and Reiki. "It was great to come into a family where they accepted all this wacky natural health stuff, as they were involved in it as well," she says with a smile.

In their spare time, they are working on the cottage. Their bedroom is currently a building site; the ceiling stripped back to the beams and the walls back to the original granite. Gradually, they are creating a cosy home for themselves, their dog Pippa and cats Bean and Roobarb.

They are touched by the warm welcome they have received from their neighbours. "It was December when we came, very cold, and we had been travelling for eight hours," recalls Iain. "We were exhausted – and the neighbours invited us in for a plate of chilli and a glass of wine."

He loves the land as well as the people. "You can put on your wellies and there's miles of countryside all around you. Even when I'm working, it's like I'm on holiday. There are palm trees on the roundabouts, and then you turn the corner, and you see St Michael's Mount. It doesn't get much better than that." 

To contact Iain Stevens call 01736 710930 or visit www.themastersweep.co.uk. For more information about chirokinetic therapy, Melissa's health therapies, or Iain's band, visit www.chirokinetictherapy.com, www.melissastevens.co.uk and www.grooveology.co.uk.