

INIGO



Beekeeper's Cottage

MELLIS, SUFFOLK

SOLD

Beekeeper's Cottage is a delightful Grade II-listed two-bedroom cottage in bucolic Mellis Common, Suffolk, close to both Diss and Eye. It is a house that bridges two eras: the older timber-framed section is of 17th-century origin and is characterised by its white-painted exposed timber, pamment floors and warming wood-burning fires, while the more recent kitchen extension melds the colour and materiality of modernism with vernacular sensibilities. Ensnconced by common land and mature trees, the house's grounds extend to around three-quarters of an acre and comprise cut flower beds, an orchard, herbaceous borders and vegetable beds, as well as a happy colony of bees that supply the current owners with honey. There is also a summerhouse (sometimes used as a guest bedroom), a workshop, a large patchwork-tin shed and a fecund polytunnel.

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Setting the Scene

The village of Mellis is an ancient one, recorded in Domesday variously as 'Melles', 'Metles' and 'Mellel'. It borders an expansive 150-acre grazing common where the houses are set far back from the road down individual lanes, almost invisible when the trees and hedges come into leaf. The common is protected from further development and has had many well-known residents over the years, including the naturalist and "father of the wild swimming movement" Roger Deakin, whose former dwelling, Walnut Tree Farm, is nearby.

Beekeeper's Cottage, like many of the houses on the common, began as a simple early modern hall house, later converted to a pair of humble workers' cottages in the 18th century. Recent history has seen the cottages reunited and the addition of an airy kitchen extension complete with underfloor heating throughout the ground floor. With no near neighbours, there is an abundance of peace and space, but when company is desired, the popular local, The Railway Tavern, is a short walk away.

The Grand Tour

Approached via a series of field-flanked country roads, the house sits in a secluded spot encircled by its verdant grounds, with farm and pastureland beyond. A long private track spurs off the country road and winds through meadow towards the cottage. The ochre-yellow traditional lime plaster exterior gradually comes into view on the approach - its honeyed tones pleasingly contrasted with the Manor House Grey by Farrow and Ball used to pick out the windows and doors. A thatched roof crowns the building and exudes a postcard-pretty cottage appeal.

The principal entry to the house is via the light-filled glazed hall that connects the older and newer portions of the house. Cosy clay pamment flooring guides underfoot towards the old cottage, where two reception rooms are arranged on either side of a wide Suffolk brick firestack now fitted with modern log burners. Both rooms are encased by white-painted timber-framed walls, a shade that amplifies the lovely quality of light drawn in through double-aspect windows.

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At the other end of the glazed hall is the newer portion of the house, which is largely occupied by the kitchen and dining room. Colour is employed confidently here: a navy oil-fired Aga is paired with a sunshine yellow glass splash-back. A combination of stainless steel and white timber units run along one wall, providing plenty of preparation space. There is ample room for a large farmhouse table on the other side of the room, beneath an almost modernist-inspired wraparound window that invites the greenery of the garden inside. A pantry adjoins at the far end of the kitchen, with a deep cupboard and smart shower room completing the ground-floor plan.

Stairs ascend from the easterly living room to the first floor, where the house's two bedrooms and large dressing room or office lie. All are framed by the cocooning pitch of the roof and have serene views to the sprawling gardens outside. The room currently used as the main bedroom (though all are of a good size) has direct access to the upstairs bathroom, where a freestanding bathtub provides a restorative way to while away an afternoon.

The Great Outdoors

Substantial grounds surround the house. Keen gardeners, the current owners have carved out areas for blossom, fruit, vegetable and herb. Cupping the rear façade of the old cottage and kitchen extension is a lawned area flanked with an established perennial border. Securely fenced, this area is accessed via the expansive glazed hall and become something of an outdoor room in fine weather. A patio has space for a large outdoor dining table perfect for outdoor suppers.

A large cut-flower patch flanks the other side of the house and is full of decadent dahlias, billowing echinacea, cheerful rudbeckia, papery geum and a host of other perennials. It has traditionally been planted with annuals such as zinnias, cosmos, ranunculi, French marigolds, sunflowers and sweet peas. Beyond is the well-pruned orchard stocked with pear, quince, plum, crab apple, mulberry and medlar trees. Parts of the old brickwork façade of a 19th-century cottage is still in situ: a picturesque folly backdrop with David Austin's Queen of Sweden rose traversing the ruddy surface as well as an espalier fig and pear tree.

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The polytunnel is home to tomatoes, peppers and other tender species that benefit from cover. To the front of the house in the cooler, more northerly aspect, a herb and hardy vegetable plot thrive. Here, garden roses in tones of champagnes, pinks and apricot mingle with salad specimens. Rustic arches are clad in clematis, jasmine, honeysuckle and a particularly loved rose, Dame Judi Dench.

The garden is also home to a handy summerhouse that is sometimes used as overspill sleeping space. There is also a workshop with electricity and a large patchwork tin shed.

Out and About

The village of Mellis, near the market town of Eye, sits on Suffolk's northern edge bordering Norfolk along the River Waveney.

Mellis is centred around the largest grazing common in the UK. The glorious open space is fantastically flower-rich, grazed by cattle and horses in summer, framed by old, moated farm buildings, railway cottages and a few newer developments, along with an area for football-playing in the centre. The Common has remained relatively unchanged for hundreds of years, affording a glimpse of what large parts of the county used to look like: the Hodgkinson's 1783 map of Suffolk depicts an outline of the common that is entirely recognisable.

The common's importance to the rural landscape is recognised by its designations as a Conservation Area, a Special Landscape Area and a County Wildlife Site. Wildlife rich ponds and wet depressions pockmark the land where the clay has been quarried for building since medieval times. In summer rare plants such as green-winged orchid, sulphur clover and adder's tongue fern flourish. An abundance of small mammals also makes the site a favourite hunting ground for barn owl, tawny owl and kestrel.

Cowpasture Lane (beloved and protected from agricultural encroachment by former Mellis resident, writer Roger Deakin) runs alongside the land, leading towards Thornham Hall and its grand gardens in less than three miles. Originally a drovers' lane, or 'long green' dating back to the Middle Ages, it was an important link between local markets.

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The village and common are hubs of creativity. Artists, stained glass restoration experts, musicians, authors, playwrights and former renowned dancers are all within the local community. The local pub, The Railway Tavern, regularly hosts live music and quiz nights while the Mellis Memorial Hall has regular fitness and yoga classes, as well as community events. The area has many walking trails and bridleways, making it a haven to keen walkers, runners and equestrians, alike. Also of note nearby are the villages of Fressingfield, Laxfield, Dennington, Worlingworth, Earl Soham, Debenham and the market town of Eye with its regular farmer's market, butchers, bakery, and an array of fantastic antique stores.

Slightly further afield, the Suffolk coast is noted both for its beauty and, increasingly, its cultural attractions, including the towns of Snape Maltings, Aldeburgh, Southwold and Walberswick, which are all around one hour's drive away.

There are several well-regarded schools in the area, including the excellent Mellis Primary School and Hartismere High School.

Despite its rural location, transport connections are very good, with Diss train station (a 14-minute drive away) providing direct links to London Liverpool Street in 90 minutes, or a two-hour drive direct to central London. It is also under an hour by car to the larger towns of Norwich, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich.

Council Tax Band: C

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