

The garrison town

By Liz Vercoe

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The redevelopment of a barracks that dates back to the Napoleonic era has attracted much interest from local buyers. Liz Vercoe reports

The train from the City of London's Fenchurch Street station slides by rows of back gardens and the odd flag bearing the Cross of St George; then stocky grazing ponies, followed by rocking sail boats and the "Estuary Fish" stall on an hourlong journey. This is estuary Essex, linked heart and soul to the East End. From the air-conditioned train you can miss the vastness of Southend and even the gentility of Thorpe Bay. But you can't miss the end of the line: Shoeburyness.



The Garrison includes many period features which recall its military past

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"To be honest it's a scruffy old town," says Colin Jones. Yet he has just exchanged contracts on a £550,000 three-bedroom property, three minutes from the station. So what is the attraction?

The answer is The Garrison, the renovation of a barracks with a history stretching back to the Napoleonic era. There will eventually be 450 homes on the site ranging from the £1.5 million Victorian mansion, which is already sold, to new three-bedroom houses starting at £249,950. "I can see what this place will become in four or five years and if we don't get in now we'll miss it," explains Colin, a former newspaper advertising executive.

He and his wife Elaine, who are in their mid-sixties, loved their luxurious five-bedroom family home in Billericay and weren't really thinking about moving – until they stumbled upon The Garrison during a drive by the sea. "Even when we drove in we still weren't 100 per cent impressed. It wasn't until we walked around that we realised what this

development is all about.”

Their walk took them across the former parade ground in front of the houses of Horseshoe Parade, where there is a cannon forever preserved under the clock tower (a pool and fitness suite are soon to open). They walked under the trees surrounding the cricket pitch, with its 1870s white pavilion, where the sound of willow on leather could be heard on most Sundays this summer. They strolled past former officers’ quarters converted into two- and three-bed apartments and on to the seafront.

And they fell in love with The Pavilions, three colonnaded bungalows, once the military post office and a schoolhouse, set around their own private courtyard.

“It’s unique,” says Colin of his new home. “We loved its pillars, which make it look colonial. And the high ceilings. You get so much space.”

This lends the living room a fine proportion, with its French windows to the garden. “The garden is smaller than the one we’ve got, but still about 100ft long and I think it will be enough to look after as we get older.”

Built in the early 1900s, each building has been renovated into a three-bedroom, two-bathroom home with fitted kitchen, double garage and covered verandah. “It struck us as so peaceful. And have you seen Southend recently? It’s got great restaurants; two casinos. And it’s just minutes away.”

So this, rather than The Garrison’s history, is what sold the development to Colin and Elaine. But there’s no escaping its military past, with signs for Brigadier Way and Magazine Road and houses called The Guard House or Warrant Officer Cottage.

There is also to be a heritage centre, as well as a village shop and possibly a school. Even the local pub, just outside the ancient defensive walls, contributes. In *The Captain Mannerling* (sic) there are pictures of shiny-faced First World War optimists and a conversation at the bar recalls the “King’s Own” exercising their horses in the sea.

The site of The Garrison has been a defensive position at the mouth of the Thames since the Iron Age, but it was the development of weaponry for the Crimean War in 1854 that led to Shoeburyness becoming an arms testing station. A school of gunnery was set up in 1859, and the Garrison was central to developing rifled barrels, breach loading, Captain Boxer’s shrapnel, machine guns, and cordite to replace gunpowder.

Later, Frankie Howerd trained here in the Second World War, starting his entertainment career in the Garrison’s theatre. The station continued to house artillery units until 1976 and was eventually sold in 2000 to Gladedale for development.

But it’s not all history and heritage. The development includes the award-winning, highly sculptural Outlook apartments overlooking the sea and Gladedale recently ran a competition for a building to rival Gateshead’s Angel of the North as a landmark. The winner was the 75- apartment, ecologically-friendly Green Mark tower destined for the western end of the site.

If prices seem rather high, as they do to some local agents whose bread and butter comes from neat £230,000 three-bedroom houses, Colin has done his homework. “My surveyor reckoned they’re right for something so different and of this quality.”

He has no doubts. “We’ve lived in Essex all our lives and wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. And here we have the sea. Our family is near. In fact we’ve been looking at some of the new houses on The Garrison in case our children are interested...”

ATTEN-SHUN!

Prices: Properties at The Garrison range from £249,950 for a new three-bedroom house to £774,950 for a renovated five-bedroom Victorian family home. If you are trading up, with a home still to sell, part exchange may be possible.

Contact: Gladedale Homes, 01702 290 232, www.gladedale.com (<http://www.gladedale.com/>) .

Sales also through agents Dedman Property Services 01702 292636 www.dedman.net/resigarrison.asp (<http://www.dedman.net/resigarrison.asp>) .

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