

Mystery about secret passage is partly solved. . .

A MYSTERY about a secret passage discovered at a derelict joinery works has been partly solved.

Financial adviser John Turner and his wife, Sam, are converting buildings behind Moor Lane, Clitheroe, into "incubator units" for fellow entrepreneurs.

It was as work to transform what was once J. H. Fern Joiners into 10 offices, that the secret passage was revealed.

As a result, the Turners were keen to find out more about the site's history.

Having read our article about the development, keen local historian Mr John Lambert who had already done some research about the site contacted the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times.

He told us that the strip of land between Lowergate and the Castle Rock was known as Kiln Garth Croft and was part of the Rose and Crown estate.

After Moor Lane was opened up, Mr Lambert can date the Turners' building back to around 1842 when it was a stone yard belonging to Henry Briggs who had leased the land from the corporation.

Mr Lambert said the arched tunnel that was exposed during recent renovations had probably been a domestic kiln to enable lime to be used for a number of domestic purposes, either for fertiliser or paint - a type of ancient recycling.

The Advertiser was also contacted by Mr Norman and Mrs Jean Brown, who are related to Mr Fern, of the joinery business. To them he was Uncle Harry and his wife is Auntie Barbara.

After Mr Fern's death in the summer, Mr and Mrs Brown have made regular trips to the Ribble Valley to visit Mrs Fern and it was during one of these visits that they read our article about the new business accommodation.

Said Mr Brown: "Uncle Harry moved to Clitheroe in the 1950s or 60s and set up his own business. Originally from Chesterfield, he met his wife in Derby and was given the opportunity to come to Lancashire to work as a quantity surveyor. Then he decided to set up his own business so he would be known by a lot of people in the area.

"He also worked with Ken Brass, and they were partners for a number of years before Ken took over the business."

On learning more about the history of their building, Mr and Mrs Turner said: "With all this wonderful history going back to the mid 1800s we want to conserve as much of the building's heritage as possible.

"While the interior of the offices themselves will be very clean cut, efficient and modern, we have decided to name each office suite drawing on the rich past and are very grateful to the Browns and Mr Lambert for their help. If anyone has more information, please pop in and see us at Fern Court."

They are now well on the way to transforming the site thanks to the funding they received from the Rural Lancashire Development Grant and Lancashire County Developments Ltd which has helped cover the conversion costs of the old workshop and associated garages.

A small grant from Lancashire Leader will help the Turners market the development.