

Dodgy plumbing, huge bills, sleepless night and tenants who are staying put. When these couples took on run-down mansions they got a lot more than they bargained for. By Diana Appleyard

Welcome to the money pit!

Would you take on a crumbling mansion with 63 chimneys and galloping dry rot? A new Channel 4 series, *Country House Rescue* – presented by hotelier and country house expert Ruth Watson – talks to families who have taken on dilapidated piles, charting the dilemmas, money worries and family rows. We talk to three of the couples who gave it a go...

Pentillie Castle, Cornwall

Last year, Ted Coryton, 61, and his wife, Sarah, 59, inherited the 18-bedroom Pentillie Castle. The couple, who have three grown-up children, plan to run the house as a wedding venue and for exclusive hire, and they live in a farm on the estate.

Ted says When I discovered I had inherited the house, I could have sold up and become indescribably rich or moved in, becoming indescribably broke. It was last Christmas Eve and we sat around the table as a family and discussed whether we were mad enough to take on the project.

Every member of the family had different ideas: running a cookery school, hiring it out, or selling – even after death duties, we would have had enough money to make millionaires of all of us. In fact, a friend of mine offered me up to £17 million, and there was that split second of wondering. I could be lying on a beach in the Caribbean now, and driving a Bentley rather than a beaten-up Land Rover. However, I believe that money does not make you happy. My daughter, Roonie, is an NHS physiotherapist, and what price would her



Sarah and Ted Coryton, Pentillie Castle, below

£20,000-odd salary be against inheriting all that money? It makes working pointless, and work is good for you. So together, we decided to take on the challenge of updating the castle and making it pay.

The house had been owned by my cousin. ❏

❏ When he died, his widow stayed on and basically lived as a hermit. She died at 92 without any of us going inside the place for years, so only when I opened the door for the first time did I realise what we were taking on. The castle was built in 1698, and was greatly altered in 1810 and again in 1966. It had been modernised a little, but was in a poor condition. There was just one bathroom for 18 bedrooms, and the only insulation was straw in the roof.

We were facing inheritance tax of about £1.5 million, plus all the costs of the renovation. I'm paying this off by selling parts of the land, but we are currently selling into a falling market. But then, when I look up at the walls and the battlements, the castle seems to tell me I am doing the right thing. The house draws you in, and you begin to fall in love with it.

We're hard at work on the renovations now, and the plan is to be open to the public by July next year. Getting reliable workmen and builders is one of the hardest things. People look at the size of it and say, 'No thanks.' My painter walked out after two weeks, which was a disaster as painting the exterior was a major project. It was grey, and it is now a much brighter orangey-yellow. My wife is in charge of the interior decor, and we're installing bathrooms and renovating. I have had many sleepless nights lying there fretting at two or three in the morning, but the finances will work out in the end, I'm sure.

The castle came with staff, not least of all Ivor Palmer, who's 83 and does the gardening five days a week. I feel he owns the house as much as I do. It's been in our extended family for generations. For all the sleepless nights it is such a privilege to own a house like this. We look out over the most astounding view in Cornwall, and I feel extremely privileged and proud to have the ownership of such an extraordinary building. It is huge – it takes 20 minutes to walk around the perimeter of the walls – and there's almost a sense of disbelief when you compare it to the houses in which I grew up. It's a cross I will happily bear for my children, and the house is registered as a business, so I can give it to my children, free of inheritance tax. I'm relishing the challenge, too – we all are. It is a fantastic legacy from me to them, and knowing that drives us on.

