



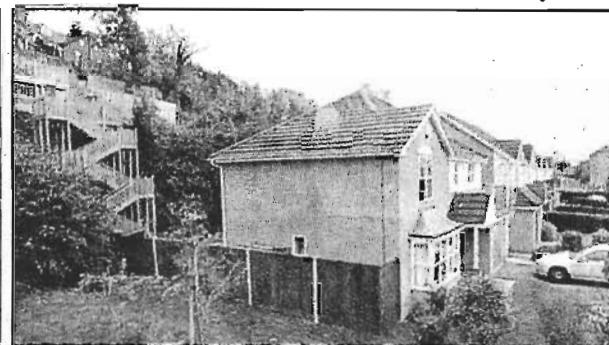
High tea: Moira Spearman climbs the tower

# Our stairway to heaven...

(...well, at least to a view of the river)



Top that: The Spearman's view of the Medway



Home improvement: The couple's Kent property

WHEN David Spearman bought his new house, he thought the bottom of his garden would be perfect for a vegetable patch.

The only snag was that it happened to be up a sheer 50ft cliff. Undeterred, he took inspiration from the home improvement shows he loves to watch on TV and built a wooden tower with six flights of stairs to scale the chalk cliff.

The £10,000, 90-step tower, which took six months to build, not only allows the IT worker and his wife Moira to reach the end of their garden, but the top also doubles as a patio with decking, a table, four

benches and a superb view of the River Medway. Even council worker Mrs Spearman, who does not have a head for heights, was impressed.

They moved into the four-bedroom home in Rochester, Kent, three years ago after deciding to downsize when their two grown-up children had flown the nest.

Initially the couple were unhappy that the cliff overshadowed their garden but grandfather of one Mr Spearman, 44, then saw its potential. 'I thought, all that land up there is being wasted,' he said. 'I could grow my vegetables up there and have a fantastic view while doing it.' But to

get up, he had to use ropes and ladders, and had to abseil down.

He got a local architect to draw up plans for the softwood tower, and planning permission was finally granted after several refusals.

Because he was unemployed over the summer, he was able to help in the construction himself. His next plan is to build a greenhouse on the land next to the platform and finally create his vegetable patch.

Mr Spearman said his neighbours are all friends and don't mind the tower while one is even likely to copy it. 'When we tell people we've built a staircase in the garden they say, 'Oh, whatever'', he said. 'But when they see the photos it blows them away.'