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BUILDING A BETTER RURAL FUTURE

Did you know?

SOME of the words and expressions in everyday use in counties Antrim and Down in the late nineteenth century never cease to amaze me, especially since some have entirely different meanings today and yet many have retained their original identity. Belfast-born William Hugh Patterson, MIRA, an acknowledged expert in the peculiarities of the local dialects of that period in those two counties, sheds light on a language that we know now has been adapted to fit the improvements in education and the introduction of more modern life-styles and technology. In my last series of extracts from his 1880 published work, **“A Glossary of Words in use in The Counties of Antrim and Down”**, he referred to the word **‘Sojer’** (‘soldier’), sb. as ‘a red herring’. This week the word appears to have yet another meaningful application.

‘Soldiers, sb. pl. The little creeping sparks on paper that has been burned, but is not quite converted into ashes, are called by children, ‘soldiers’.

Sole, [1] sb. a sill. ‘A window sole’.

[2] sb. the sod; grassy turf. ‘The lawn has a good sole’.

Sonsy and douce, pleasant and quiet.

Sonsy, adj. lucky. ‘It’s not sonsy to do that’.

Comely; stout; as applied to a woman.

Soo, sb. a sow.

Soogan, sb. a saddle of straw or rushes.

Soo lugit, sb. with the ears hanging. ‘A soo lugit horse’.

Soop, v. to sweep.

Soople, [1] sb. a part of a flail.

[2] adj. flexible, active.”

Self catering country idyll in a

Cherrybrook Self Catering began in 2008 when Michael and Anne Cooke set about restoring and retaining much of the unique character and features of an original ‘clachan’, which had last been inhabited within living memory. **Ian Harvey** paid a visit to their farmland home surrounded by beautiful gardens and cloaked by mature woodland, just off the Rathmore Road, near Antrim, to find a cottage and barn within a rural paradise.

THE Dark Hedges of north Antrim, made famous by the *Game of Thrones* TV series, sprang to mind as I drove down the avenue to Michael and Anne Cooke’s home, Cherrybrook, near Dunadry.

Rows of tall, gnarled, ash and cherry trees march down either side of the long country lane forming a canopy of branches and leaves, shading the approach to their rural home. Admittedly the Cooke’s trees are not as large and ancient, or set as wide apart, but nevertheless they ought to make a big impression on any guests arriving for the first time at Cherrybrook Self Catering!

At the end of the avenue having passed a single stone gate pillar on the left partly clothed in flowers, one is immediately faced with large windows set into the gable end of what clearly was an ancient stone barn-like building, the end of a row of old farm buildings now evidently charmingly restored.

The approach to Cherrybrook veers to the left and I drove past flowering shrubs with a backdrop of mature hardwood trees and neatly kept sweeping lawns leading to the front of the house, where a beautiful, yellow-leaved Japanese maple tree commands attention in the centre of the turning circle.

“Great to see you Ian,” said Anne, giving me a friendly hug, as Michael joined us greeting me with a broad smile on his face.

One of the first things I mentioned was the front avenue looking remarkably ‘Dark Hedges-like’.

“You’re not the first to make that remark,” Michael responded.

“In fact so many folk, either guests or

■ GUEST PREP: Anne Cooke of Cherrybrook Self Catering, Rathmore Road, Antrim, lays out clean towels with a sprig of lavender picked from her garden to add that welcoming cottage garden touch. FW-1A.

friends and neighbours have said the same that we’ve dubbed it, ‘Not the Dark Hedges!’

“Perhaps one day if many more of the real Dark Hedges fall down, our version might take its place in some future film,” he added jokingly.

It was immediately clear that the grounds and gardens are a huge feature of Cherrybrook, a name apparently given to the place when Michael and Anne bought the farm and old buildings over 30 years ago and named their newly built house after a large white cherry tree and small stream trickling close by. Michael had to make a brief visit to his mother’s home nearby, so Anne undertook the initial guided tour of the grounds and self catering accommodation, which I’d come to see.

As we walked through the gardens surrounding their beautiful home with bright sunshine casting early autumnal shadows, Anne explained how it had all developed.

“Right from the start we wanted to help nature to enhance our own rural home, so that group of maturing hardwood trees to our left was planted by Conservation Volunteers to add to the trees already here.

“They also built that low dry-stone wall where the house faces



■ OUTDOORS: Guests staying at Cherrybrook Self Catering have all the benefits of the outdoors and can relax in beautiful garden surroundings, enjoying a sense of peaceful secluded rural life. FW-1X

our farmland below to divide the house from the land in a natural way, although we’ve since extended the garden and lawns into part of the large field and created another feature low wall further down.

“The agricultural land has been rented to a local farmer but five years ago we planted a four-acre hardwood forest, complete with a woodland walk and glade, partly for the added benefit of our self catering guests.

“Andrew Cunningham of Crooked Stone Conservation made a terrific job of the planting which has helped make our guests feel totally at home in the countryside.

“By the way we encourage them to stroll round our gardens, go for forest walks and take advantage of a peaceful and beautiful country retreat.”

As we walked round the gardens, stopping to look at an area set aside with raised flowerbeds and outdoor seating, I began to get a sense of what the Cooke’s are evidently keen to portray to their self catering visitors. Having almost completed a circuit of Cherrybrook, we came to a well-ordered vegetable patch surrounded by a neat wicker fence with a Beatrix Potter ‘Peter Rabbit’ style gate.

“We are working our way round to our two self catering buildings, Apple Barn and Apple Cottage, but first let

■ SOLAR PANELS: In keeping with the Cooke’s philosophy of energy conservation, solar panels have been installed on the roofs of both accommodations and as Michael explains they produce 5.8kWh, enough for self catering, house and Grid. FW-1S.

■ KITCHEN: Apple Cottage kitchen has all the modern conveniences yet with a farmhouse kitchen feel and look with a wooden table and chairs, pleasing decor with traditional kitchen cupboard fittings and a cooker peep-hole window. FW-1R.



me show you the vegetable garden, where incidentally, we also encourage guests to join me and help themselves to a small selection of fresh produce,” said Anne, opening the gate and giving me a quick tour of her fascinating horticultural plot, offering everything from maize ‘corn on the cob’ to potatoes, with some exotic vegetables adding a touch of mystery to the more common runner beans.

An equally brief visit to a plastic poly-tunnel hidden from view behind a tall hedge revealed the production of Cape gooseberries, ornamental gourds and small sweet tomatoes, all available to guests. Anne, who incidentally



Useful contacts

- Rural Development Council
028 8676 6980
- Rural Community Network
028 8676 6670
- Rural Support Line
0845 606 7607
- DARD Grants and Subsidies
Division 028 7131 9900
- Post Office Customer
Helpline 08457 223344
- Health Action Zone
028 8772 9017
- Farming Families Bureau
028 7930 1003



“We didn’t want to see the buildings deteriorate further and set out to restore them originally as an overflow to our home.”



Leading agricultural journalist and broadcaster IAN HARVEY looks behind the scenes at rural community issues and how farmers are meeting the challenge of developing the farm business and supporting the farm family

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charming, restored, 'clachan'



■ **CHERRYBROOK:** Above, Michael and Anne Cooke's home, Cherrybrook, on farmland just off the Rathmore Road, was built on energy efficient lines in 1985 and named to recognise the presence of a large white cherry tree and small stream nearby. FW-1B.



■ **COTTAGE:** Below, Apple Cottage is a two bedroom traditional restored cottage which accommodates three guests, with deep window sills, a traditional half-door 'for passing the time' and a pretty cottage garden with wicket gate. FW-1L.



■ **SELF-CATERING:** The two Cherrybrook Self Catering stone-buildings known as Apple Cottage and Apple Barn were once part of a larger group of cottages known as a 'clachan' and have been restored and refurbished to NITB 4-star standard. FW-1K.



■ **POPULAR:** The hen-run at Cherrybrook Self Catering is one of the really popular aspects of 'a stay' at either Apple Cottage or Apple Barn, especially if guests feel like lending a hand at feeding time, as demonstrated by Anne Cooke. FW-1N.

■ **VEGETABLES:** Apple Cottage and Apple Barn guests are encouraged to visit the Cooke's gardens, floral or vegetable and even pick a selection of fruit or vegetables for themselves and, if they so wish, have a woodland stroll. FW-1D.



has a Diploma in Horticulture from Greenmount, CAFRE, clearly has a deep interest in all aspects of gardening, amply demonstrated by the huge variety of plants, flowers, shrubs and trees at Cherrybrook.

On the way to Apple Barn and Apple Cottage we passed a damson tree laden with fruit, bright-berried hedges and finally at the rear of the two buildings, partly clothing a high fenced hen-run under the trees beyond, were two apple trees.

One tree grows Bramley cooking apples and the other produces eating apples, not hard to figure the reason for the self catering names!

By now Michael had re-joined us pointing out that the row of stone buildings were rusty tin-roofed farm buildings when they first bought the place, which turned out to have had a former life as a small group or 'clachan' of farm cottages.

"It was confirmed by the fact that one of our self catering guests from abroad knew all about the former habitable nature of the cottages," he added.

"Evidently two cottages had been knocked into one to create a barn at some later point and some of the other original cottages had simply crumbled away to nothing and been removed.

"We didn't want to see the buildings deteriorate further and set out to restore them originally as an overflow accommodation for our home.

"Left with just two buildings, a barn and a cottage, we replaced the rafters and re-roofed using highly-insulated red-coloured modern corrugated iron to simulate the style of the farm buildings we inherited, although no doubt the original cottages were thatched."

The couple's planting scheme outside reflects a cottage garden ideal with cornflower, nasturtiums, phlox, lavender, a recorrent bush and herb bushes dotted around.

Apple Cottage had been rough-



■ **SITTING ROOM:** The relaxing end of Apple Cottage enhances the rural atmosphere with a high-ceiling, wood-burning stove, lots of light and pretty garden views, comfort and a spacious feel. FW-1Q.

plaster rendered outside with traditional white-wash finish, while the barn by contrast was left with its natural stone exterior.

Through a half door in the cottage and past a traditional 'peep hole' window in the porch, the inside is everything one would hope for and more, with an open-plan effect created by an modern extension to the rear offering high-ceiling spaciousness and a wood-burning stove set in a tall cottage chimney breast.

The floor I was told is 'salvaged' maple wood, from a former Ballymena gymnasium, once apparently trodden on by a sporty Liam Neeson!

The atmosphere of bright airiness carries through to Apple Barn next door where the decor gives way to a huge high-ceilinged single room with a perfect blend of traditional barn and contemporary furnishings.

Probably the first self catering 'all in one' unit I've come across, with a king size bed, comfortable seating,

■ **HAMPER:** The Cherrybrook Self Catering hamper includes a selection of local produce, from their own fresh eggs, tomatoes and vegetables, to award-winning yoghurt, flour and bread to name but a few. FW-1U.



■ **BARN:** Apple Barn retains much of its former character as a converted farm barn, originally two cottages and now an open-plan barn with traditional features like salvaged plank-flooring yet furnishings of a more contemporary nature. FW-1T.

breakfast table and kitchen in perfect harmony. Again a salvage feature of polished broad pinewood planking adds a warm comforting feel and that all important authentic barn look. Outside again and Anne took up the story.

"When we first approached the NI Tourist Board they were very helpful with advice and we were awarded NITB four-star rating."

Michael, who trained in west Wales at a centre for alternative technology and who designed their home on energy-efficient lines, pointed to the roofs: "Three years in to our self catering business we added solar-panels which provides all the energy

needs for the two units and even my electric car, with the surplus sold to the national grid."

Anne remarked: "We even have a small solar-powered electric fence at the hen run, as a sharp reminder to Mr Fox that he can't just help himself to our laying hens!"

"Incidentally, the hens have proved to be one of the most appealing attractions to our visitors.

"We have folk staying here from all over the world and the British Isles, it's so convenient to airports and all the main tourist attractions and amenities one can think of, not to mention the fact that it's a real rural retreat."



For more information
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