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Did the earth move for you?

Jun 5 2004
Bethan Lloyd, The Western Mail



Anne Owen Taylor packed in her job with the Wales Tourist Board to undertake the restoration of her family farm in Carmarthen-shire. Thirteen years after the initial planning stage, work is finally under way. This is the first installment of her diary...

NO-ONE ever claims that doing a farmhouse restoration project is easy but, so far, I am on my second project manager, my third interior designer and my second firm of builders - rather a high tally considering building work has not even started yet.

Maybe my bad experiences are to do with the fact that the project has been 13 years in the planning.

My family has owned Cefnmeurig, a 98-acre farm near St Clears, Carmarthenshire since before 1747. My mother, Nest, was born at Cefnmeurig but following the retirement of my grandfather just before World War II the farm was occupied by tenants. The last tenant, Edgar Williams, retired 13 years ago and the farmhouse has been empty ever since.

Sadly, a 98-acre farm is no longer financially viable as a single farming unit so the family decided to let the land to local farmers and renovate the farmhouse as a self-catering cottage.

Coming from a background in accountancy and tourism, Cefn-meurig has provided me with an ideal opportunity to put into practice my ideas on up-market holiday accommodation and to set up a tourism business called "Self-catering for Softies". The plan is that it will be available to let from Easter 2005.

Cefnmeurig has been described as a period piece, untouched by the usual 20th Century-disasters. The present stone farmhouse was built around 1800, if not before, as its sheltered location suggests the site of an earlier dwelling. My ancestors may have predated the Federation of Master Builders but they knew the secret of constructing a warm and dry house. Even in its present empty state, the house never feels cold and damp even on the bleakest winter day.



The farmhouse has the look of a Welsh longhouse and has been little changed since the late 19th Century. There are two very fine stone outbuildings built in the 1880s and an older part-clom (mud walls), part-brick coach house.

Work may not yet have started on the farmhouse but the local men have already moved the earth for me - they used their diggers, dumpers and shovels to shift tons and tons of soil to make a driveway a third of a mile long, in three days.

The farmhouse is a mile from the main road, the final third of a mile being our own farm track. Up until last year, the track was impassable in wet weather but a local contractor, Julian Mousley, solved all the drainage problems.

Cefnmeurig is too far from the main road to be connected to the mains water supply. The family used to rely on a well by the back door but modern living with en-suite bathrooms, washing machines and dishwashers means this one source of water is likely to be inadequate. I was introduced to a dowser who had a very good reputation for finding clean water. His first comment on the phone was "I need to concentrate completely when I am searching for water.

"For example, if I am thinking about having sex with a woman I lose all my powers." Only an elderly man can get away with a comment like that and still be given a job.

Drilling for water is a noisy and messy business and after two days and drilling down 200ft the water ran clear, sweet and fast; more than enough for a farmhouse with four en-suite bathrooms.

I have found a songwriter and musician to project-manage the restoration. Colin Jones from St Clears plays in a band by night and masquerades as a super-efficient building surveyor by day. He was the first person I came across who actually did things when he said he was going to do them.

Work is scheduled to start on the farmhouse in a couple of weeks but don't hold your breath - I have been saying that for the last 13 years....

Contact Anne Owen Taylor on 029 2089 9280; or email: info@visitwestwales.com; website: www.visitwestwales.com Follow the day-to-day progress of Cefnmeurig's restoration on the weblog: <http://visitwestwales.blogs.com>

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