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Greenfingered Garry shows Anne a wild thyme

Oct 2 2004
Staff Reporter, The Western Mail



Work is progressing well at Cefnmeurig but there may be difficult times ahead. Anne Owen Taylor continues the diary of the restoration of her family farm in Carmarthenshire...

NEXT WEEK, I will probably have to make the biggest decision on the project so far; whether or not to replace the roof. To leave the roof as it is, with minimal repairs, might prove to be a false economy if the job has to be done a few years down the line anyway.

There is nothing wrong with the slates, they will last another hundred years, the problem lies with the nails that hold them in place. These nails normally have a life of about 70 years and since the roof probably went up around 1890, they are on borrowed time.

This is the start of the stressful period, as cheques are drawn for increasingly larger amounts and some costs run over budget.

It's impossible to get the cost of each item spot-on but the vital thing is to keep to your total budget, unless you decide to do additional work that adds value. Fine in theory but easier said than done.

I think I will have to start putting a sprig of rosemary under my pillow at night. According to the Physicians of Myddfai, (the 13th Century Carmarthenshire doctors which according to legend were descended from the Lady of the Lake) this will prevent nightmares and remove feelings of anxiety.



I had only budgeted for minor roof repairs so the cost of replacing the roof will have to come out of my contingency pot.

I haven't had a quotation yet, so when that arrives I may well have to resort to the Physicians' cure for hysteria - feverfew, wormwood, bark of ash and spring water. Luckily, they can all be found on Cefnmeurig land.

I wouldn't have known this if it hadn't been for Garry Thomas. A chance meeting in a graveyard, lead to Garry and his family walking the farm with us and identifying and explaining the symbiosis of the flora and fauna in an understandable and entertaining way. It was one of the most enjoyable few hours I had spent in a long time.

Garry is a botanist and used to be a ranger with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. I asked him to draw up a design for the garden atCefnmeurig with a planting theme based around native Welsh plants.

I also asked him to consider being a wildlife and walking guide for future guests staying at Cefnmeurig and Tenby.

Cefnmeurig has never been intensively farmed and a tithe map of 1837 confirms that the field boundaries on the farm have not changed since that date. I have been intrigued to find out whether the hedgerows pre date 1837.

There is a method of dating hedgerows called Hooper's rule that counts the number of species of trees and shrubs over a distance of 30 yards.

The greater the number of species the older the hedge. It seems likely that most of the hedges were planted in the early 19th Century.

The hedges enclosing the farmstead and particularly the area around the old orchard below the house are older. My mother often said that one tree produced apples so big, one apple was sufficient to make a generous tart.

For once, this is not a distorted childhood memory as the apples are enormous; they would even defeat the jaws of Mick Jagger.

The Physicians of Myddfai considered apples as having almost magical status but not quite as magical as the spice saffron.

They said, "If you would be at all times merry, eat saffron in meat or drink and you will never be sad; but beware of eating over much, least you should die of excessive joy."

Saffron will be severelyrestricted in the kitchen atCefnmeurig as I haven't budgeted for the extra insur-ance cover needed for guests keeling over with "excessive joy."

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Follow the day-to-day progress of Cefnmeurig's restoration on the weblog: <http://visitwestwales.blogs.com>

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