

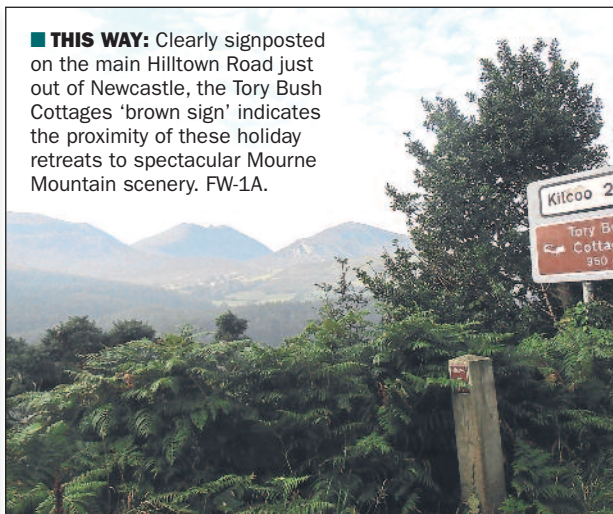
Leading agricultural journalist and broadcaster IAN HARVEY looks behind the scenes at rural community issues and how farmers are meeting the challenge of developing the farm business and supporting the farm family

# rural reality

■ **FLORAL:** Self catering guests at Tory Bush Cottages can not only enjoy unrivalled Mourne Mountain views, but also 'soak-up' everything that nature has to offer with garden plants on their doorstep attracting insect and birdlife in abundance. FW-1L.



■ **THIS WAY:** Clearly signposted on the main Hilltown Road just out of Newcastle, the Tory Bush Cottages 'brown sign' indicates the proximity of these holiday retreats to spectacular Mourne Mountain scenery. FW-1A.



■ **LOCATION:** Tory Bush Cottages, near Kilcoo, Newcastle, owned and run by David Maginn, takes its name from an infamous 17th century 'Tory' (renegade) Redmond O'Hanlon, who hid-out under a nearby tree. FW-1B.

## mountain views

arrival yard behind the cottages, walking through one of the communal gardens, I spotted a dazzlingly beautiful Peacock butterfly with its red and brown wings, tipped with black circled spots of white and blue.

It landed on a stone right in front of us, beside a vintage red and yellow hay rake which at one time had been tractor-mounted and which David had strategically placed amongst small boulders and colourful shrubs.

Below the garden a carefully managed small field of cut grass had a small football net at one end and evidently served as a play area for cottagers and their children.

Settled with a cup of coffee in a room upstairs above the conference room, reception office and hallway, David explained the history of the establishment of Tory Bush Cottages.

"I grew up on a farm not far from here which my father Patrick Maginn ran cattle on.

"Dad was a well known cattle dealer and recognised judge of good livestock.

"Although I naturally wasn't aware of the fact that at the age of four I had inherited this farm we're now on, from a grand uncle, as I grew up dad farmed it along with the home farm and other land he rented in conacre.

"Like so many younger sons of farming families at the time I had my mind set on a future in the agricultural industry and qualified for a degree in agriculture at Queen's University.

"However, I became somewhat disillusioned by the state of the industry at that particular time, with little restraint on the excesses of productivity and the downside that resulted from that.

"So I went to visit a friend in London, got a job driving a fruit and vegetable



■ **PICTURESQUE:** Stunning vistas of the Mourne Mountains, just across the glen, offer holidaymakers at Tory Bush Cottages unrivalled scenery from balconies, windows and gardens. FW-1J.

van in the old Covent Garden and then decided to set up my own business as a mini cab driver, finishing up in the east end of the city.

"I returned home in 1988 and got involved with integrated education and became enthused with the idea of holiday log cabins, inspired by my sister Bronagh.

"However, the reality was that it took five years, to 1994, to have planning approval cleared for cottages, as opposed to log cabins and by 1995 I opened Tory Bush Cottages, with some joint funding help from the NITB and the International Fund for Ireland.

"In those days it was only possible to have eight cottages minimum, under Tourist Board rules, which is what held up planning – I would have preferred to have built two or three and grown generically.

"The cottages were a big hit and they've remained popular ever since, although as you've seen Ian, it's a case

of keeping up to date and continually upgrading at expense to meet ever-increasing modern standards and demands in a highly competitive industry.

"The international tourism trade is fickle, but it's safe to say that Tory Bush Cottages attracts the largest proportion of its business from within Northern Ireland, probably 80 per cent.

"We have had every permutation from church and sporting groups to weekenders and longer stays, visitors staying for family weddings and funerals and just folk wishing to have a break from the stress of everyday life.

"I'm delighted to be able to say that there's a high level of repeat bookings, in fact there's one couple who've stayed here 17 times which is almost one booking a year since we opened!

"I've calculated that we've been instrumental over the years in bringing into this area some \$2m worth of revenue which has helped local traders, created employment and added to the value of tourism in the Mourne area.

"Jim Morgan, who you've already met, is full time as Maintenance Manager, there is one full-time, part-time cleaner and of course I work full time at the business.

"This building was erected in 2007, grant aided under NRRTI and I call this room the Eco Loft because it has sheep's wool insulation which has proved highly effective and a wood pellet heating system was installed.

"The conference room downstairs is particularly popular for lots of events but chiefly as a staff integration centre for corporate business weekends.

"I've even established a museum of old farm implements as a talking point.

"I prefer to think of this business as



■ **STABLING:** For holiday-makers wishing to bring their equine friends along to Tory Bush Cottages, there is stabling accommodation and turnout in the fields below. FW-1H.



■ **GARDENS:** Successfully creating a homely atmosphere, Tory Bush Cottages offers each cottage a garden with unique individuality. FW-1D.

selling an experience rather than just a pretty place to sleep, its excellent value for money if you add up all the advantages.

"For the past 14 years I have also leased eight holiday cottages in Dundrum to bring the total business up to a viable level."

Tory Bush Cottages has achieved much in terms of biodiversity with the introduction of a wood pellet Biomass District Heating System installed in 2013, supplied by Alternative Heat of Castlewellan, distributing sustainable heating throughout the cottages and entire complex.

The system was installed thanks in part to a DARD-backed EU RDP grant facilitated by DRAP, the local facilitators, who David told me had been extremely helpful.

The cottages are encouraged to re-cycle waste with separate bins for the purpose.

All those energy-saving aspects

and a lot more led to a Silver Award presented a few months ago under the 'Green Business Tourism Scheme', a Scottish-based International scheme.

As David pointed out, he is continually up-grading his land as a working farm but has also planted hedges and five acres of low density mainly indigenous Irish oak as a deciduous mixed forest, including the fencing off of a potentially environmentally sensitive bog.

David added that his future plan is to develop the green market value of his enterprise, something he undoubtedly seems well on the way to achieving.

**For more information**

Telephone: 028 437 24348

E-mail: info@torybush.com

Visit: www.torybush.com



■ **RECYCLE:** Waste recycling and biomass district heating at Tory Bush Cottages contributed to the award of a Silver medal, from the Scottish-based International 'Green Business Tourism Scheme', presented in March 2014. FW-1Q.