



A PLACE TO TREASURE

Jo SHELDRAKE visits a small gothic revival style mansion on the outskirts of the Cathedral city of Wells and takes a step back in time

BERYL is and was the epitome of English country living and from its start it has played host to an array of high society, from the Bishop to many well-known personalities.

Built in the 1840s as a hunting lodge, Beryl is the design of architect Benjamin Ferry, a pupil of Pugin, who was Diocesan Architect to the Diocese of Bath & Wells, carrying out much of the restoration of Wells Cathedral.

The property lights up when it's full of people and the fact that it is now run as a 14-bedroom guest house by Holly Nowell and her daughter Mary-Ellen means that it is constantly illuminated.

Eddie and Holly Nowell fell in love with Beryl the first time they set eyes on it in July 1979. It was only five days later with not even time for a survey, due to it coming up for auction, that they became the proud and slightly daunted owners; had they had time for a survey they may not have gone ahead! They went about tackling the restoration project by splitting it into phases, the first lasting three years, which included restoring the Welsh slate roof, rewiring, plumbing (there was only one bathroom), installing central heating, moving the kitchen from north to south facing, not to mention starting to tackle the overgrown 13 acres of paddock, parkland and gardens. The finishing touches are still in place today, such as the magnificent hand printed Gothic arch design wallpaper that adorns the walls of the tiled entrance hall where you are greeted on a cold day by a roaring log fire.

After the first phase it became clear that if the family were to continue, an extra income



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would need to be found. It was decided that following in the steps of the previous owners, The Jenkins Family, who had taken in guests during and after the war (a few of whom still frequent), Beryl would open its doors to paying guests. Holly, Mary-Ellen and the delightful members of Beryl staff work tirelessly to ensure that their guests enjoy the most welcoming, unforgettable and comfortable experience; the house is theirs to enjoy.

In 'the snug', a cosy room displaying collections of stone and ceramic Lions (Holly and Eddie both being Leos) tea is served from silver tea pots, poured into vintage fine bone china cups, accompanied by a slice of homemade cake. On a fine day you can step through the plate glass window to find a seat on the top lawn terrace and take in the fabulous views of the cathedral and Glastonbury Tor or relax in ▶





the elegant drawing room whilst admiring the enviable collection of blue and white porcelain that sets off the backdrop of the vibrant yellow moiré silk wallpaper and exquisite drapes hung on the original reeded Victorian pole. Not to mention the cornice, which has been hand gilded to highlight the scrolling leaf design. The effect is quite stunning.

The dining room plays host to guests each morning, where they enjoy a stately home style breakfast of a vast selection of tempting treats, surrounded by a private collection of Cantonese enamel. Everywhere you look there is another example of a fine antique throughout the house. Eddie was a highly acclaimed antique dealer who ran a shop in Wells for more than 50 years.

The restoration of this fascinating house has been relentless, and it shows. No room fails to arouse interest, every piece has been chosen as a perfect complement to the period and style of the house; it's a rare find these days.

The restored gardens beckon on a sunny day. Wander and explore the walled garden where flower beds cascade onto pebbled paths, stroll through the parkland and if you're lucky you'll spot a deer. Have a refreshing dip in the Italian themed outdoor pool or enjoy a relaxing aperitif whilst the children amuse themselves on the rustic play frame.

Beryl really does have all the essence of a family home which fundamentally is what it is, a piece of quintessential magic, how wonderful that it is being shared for all to enjoy. ♦



