

ruralreality BUILDING A BETTER RURAL FUTURE

Did you know?

THIS week's recipe extracts from the 1760 published cookbook, *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, suggests how to roast and boil pigeons. **To roast a pigeon.** "Fill them with parsley clean washed and chopped and some pepper and salt rolled in butter; fill the bellies, tie the neck-end close, so that nothing can run out, put a skewer through the legs and have a little iron on purpose, with six hooks to it, and on each hook hang a pigeon; fasten one end of the string to the chimney and the other end to the iron (this is what we call the poor man's spit) four them, baste them with butter and turn them gently for fear of hitting the bars. They will roast nicely and be full of gravy. Take care how you take them off, not to lose any of the butter and put into the dish. Your pigeons ought to be quite fresh and not too much done. This is by much the best way of doing them for they will swim in their own gravy and a very little melted butter will do. When you roast them on a spit all the gravy runs out, or if you stuff them and broil them whole you cannot save the gravy so well, though they will be very good with parsley and butter in the dish or spit and broiled with pepper and salt.

To boil pigeons. Boil them by themselves fifteen minutes, then boil a handsome square piece of bacon and lay in the middle; stew some spinach to lay around and lay the pigeons on the spinach. Garnish your dish with parsley laid on a plate before the fire to crisp. Or lay one pigeon in the middle and rest round, the spinach between each and slice of bacon on each."

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

History, charm and character

When Isabella McKenna set out to rejuvenate her maternal family home and turn it into a self catering cottage, in the townland of Muninamale, high in the breathtakingly beautiful Sperrin Mountains, she brought the rich history of a special place into sharp focus. **Ian Harvey** took to the mountain roads to find a family and farming community with enormous pride in their locality and what the area has to offer.



WELCOME: Isabella McKenna who runs her own self catering accommodation, Pat Larry's Cottage, in Glenhill, beside the Owenkillew River, high in the Sperrin Mountains, welcomes guests with friendly rural hospitality. FW-1T.



BRACE: A brace of domesticated ducks walk majestically toward the field gate leading to Pat Larry's Cottage, followed by free range hens, in the certain hope of being given a morsel or two before sundown and securely shut up for the night. FW-1M.

ANCIENT: The old stable at Pat Larry's Cottage, Isabella McKenna's 200 year old self catering cottage, is now a free range hen house and the former cow byre is a bicycle shed for visitors. FW-1R.



HUB: The kitchen is the hub of farming and country life, so a natural wood finish traditional kitchen with a modern feel with a modern feel of Pat Larry's self catering cottage. FW-1H.



"In the late nineteenth century past generations of my family, Ian, would have had to walk bare-foot to Crouck School, just across a small burn to the far side of the Owenkillew River glen," said Isabella McKenna, pointing across flat fields which make up the base of the glen. The broad valley is part of Glenhill which extends through this particular part of the Sperrin Mountain range, not far from the rural village of Greencastle. I was walking through a recently fenced field with Isabella, her husband, Eugene and youngest daughter, 14 year old Catherine, having taken a photo of some of their suckler cows grazing in a field bordering the river. "The Owenkillew River, as we heard earlier from our local historian neighbour, Councillor Sean Clarke, is now a specially protected river apparently because there are freshwater pearl mussels in the riverbed," she added, emphasising an interesting part of local environmental information. The fact is that there are only three river sites in this part of the island of Ireland where this endangered species of mollusc exists.

We were returning to Pat Larry's Cottage, which was Isabella's mother Bridget's family home, where the Bradley family had lived for generations. I had arrived at the cottage down a long lane from the Greencastle Road in the late afternoon with the sun shining brightly. Now, as the sun sank lower in the sky and shadows began to creep across the glen, I could feel a sense of the history of the place seeping into my being. It reminded me so much of the terrain of my family home and farm in the north of Inishowen, which I used to farm before dad sold the place back in the early 1970s. "When, in 2010, my aunt Margaret or Maggie as we know her, made over the cottage and 20 acres of land to me to carry on the tradition of Bradley ownership, it was a special moment in my life Ian," explained Isabella, with a note of genuine emotion in her voice. "I used to torture my father as a young girl, every Friday afternoon, to take me down to the cottage where I would have spent as long as I was allowed to stay. "There were always hens and ducks to feed and gather eggs, not to mention geese and sheep and cattle to tend. "It was a special place even then and still is to me now. "My grandfather, Patrick Bradley, reared his family there and my mother and two sisters were brought up there, Aunt Maggie and Aunt Mary. "When Grandpa Patrick Pat died in 1969 Aunt Maggie continued to live there, keeping the place neat and well cared for and ran the farm as it had always been run. "She came to live with us in 2011, in the townland of Carranrancy, just across the glen and now, as a 90 year old she still has clear memories and appreciation of the place where she grew up and lived all her life."



PAT LARRY'S: Nestling snugly close to the Owenkillew River, in a picturesque Glen in the breath-taking Sperrin Mountains, is Pat Larry's Cottage, a charming four star self catering cottage, the pride and joy of Isabella McKenna. FW-1V.

Eugene, who'd been walking beside us, remarked: "It took a while to get the farm business number sorted, but in 2012, with all that fully in place, we were able to start to rejuvenate and refurbish the cottage and bring the land into full production. "Of course it required new fencing and treatment to the land, which is an on-going process and I hope to plough up some of the ground and re-sow, so I'm currently on the look-out for a spring-loaded three furrow plough, Ian, if you know of one for sale?" he remarked with a smile. "I know the feeling," I replied, "We're currently bringing our extended small holding back into shape." As we reached the gate back into the yard of Pat Larry's Cottage, Sean turned round and emptied the can of meal he'd been carrying into several small trays for his small flock of Lyley cross lambs to enjoy an evening treat feed. A brace of domesticated black ducks waded towards us, followed closely by a small flock of hens which had all been pecking in the field before we turned up. Now the ducks and hens were allowed to come through the gate as the lambs fed and make their way towards the hen house (a former stone-bolt stable) for the night roost. An hour or so earlier, when Isabella greeted me at the front door of the cottage and invited me inside, we were joined shortly after by Sean Clarke, who had been asked to do a little research into the Bradley family's history in the area. Over a cup of tea and a slice of Mary B McKenna's scrumptious home-baked bread (apparently her baking is renowned in the area), Sean explained that his research had revealed that the Bradley family, or O'Brailaghans as they were originally known, can trace their history back to the Hearth Rolls of 1656 when an Owen O'Brailaghan lived in Colingean. Although it's a common enough



LEFT: Isabella McKenna ensures that Pat Larry's Cottage visitors are given a welcome pack at her self-catering cottage in the beautiful Sperrin Mountains, which includes Mary B McKenna's renowned home-baked bread. FW-1Z.

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

at self catering family cottage

WARM: Warm colour schemes and natural wood fittings and furnishings lend a cosy cottage feel to the bedroom surroundings at Pat Larry's Cottage, with the informal solid wood doors crafted and fitted by Eugene McKenna. FW-1G.

surname in the Muninamale townland today, the Title Books of 1830 show that there were seven Bradley families paying tithes in this townland. Sean was quick to explain: "Isabella's great grandfather Patrick Bradley, born in 1856, was known as Pat Larry, son of Laurence who was recorded in Griffith's valuation as joint tenant of the present farm in c1860. "Since Laurence's father, Patrick, was likely the joint tenant of this son, it's safe to assume that Patrick was probably born sometime within the 1790 period. "Clearly this cottage, which Isabella has aptly named after her great grandfather Pat Larry, goes back consistently in one family for generations and is likely to be well over 200 years old. "Isabella has done a great service to this community by making this into a self catering cottage and bringing this place into the forefront of our local tourism drive, not to mention the spin-off value of local sport and historical/environmental efforts. With that final compliment to Isabella and her husband Eugene, who is a joiner and self employed roofing specialist, and who had arrived only a short time after Sean, he said his goodbyes. Isabella poured another cup of tea and explained that she is a qualified nurse and had worked in Belfast hospitals for 37 years, but now nurses part-time to allow her to look after her Aunt Maggie. "Now that I'm at home a lot more during the day I can turn my attention to the cottage while Eugene does the farming. "It had always been my hope to retain the cottage in the family and when I was given the opportunity by Aunt Maggie to do something with the place, I decided to turn it into a self catering cottage so others could come here and appreciate what we have all known. "I have a deep affection for the house and wanted to retain its character and it was on a visit to another self catering open day



FEEDING: Eugene McKenna looks after the top-up feeding of his Lyley lambs on the family's small holding at Pat Larry's Cottage in the Owenkillew River glen, not far from the Sperrin Mountain village of Greencastle. FW-2A.



EMBROIDERED: Left, tastefully embroidered towels with Pat Larry's name were a gift from North American Bradley relatives who had enjoyed their stay at Pat Larry's Cottage so much that they sent the personalised towels as a memento. FW-1F.

"I came up with this idea and booked onto a six week part-time DARD Rural Diversification course at Loughry College. "The course was great and really spurred me on and DARD's Debbie Moore was a terrific support and even came here to offer guidance. "Naturally with the rural funding available, we applied through facilitators ARC North West (with help from Katie Turnbull) in July 2012, for a DARD-backed EU RDP grant which was approved later in 2013. "I went out to tender and work started on the extension and refurbishment of the cottage in March last year and was completed at the end of July that year. "We're sitting in a kitchen extension of the original cottage and with accommodation now for up to five, with en suite bathroom/shower and toilets and a comfortable living area with wood burning stove and central heating, this has been granted four star rating. "Eugene was given official permission within the grant to make all the crafted wooden doors and fittings were all chosen by me, because I have such a close association with the place and I wanted it to reflect my respect for it. "It was officially opened in November last and in December we had our first booking. "We haven't looked back since and it's been full-on with visitors coming to stay for everything from a few nights to a few weeks. "If you look through the visitors book and I want you to sign it before you go as a record of your visit, we've had guests from as far away as Australia, North America and Brazil, not to mention European countries and from Britain and Ireland, both north and south. "Already we're experiencing re-

Visitors emphasise the charm and character of the cottage, the peace and tranquility of the area and its remote and beautiful setting."

OPEN PLAN: In true cottage style, Pat Larry's Cottage offers comfortable seating and the rural touch of a turf and wood burning stove, extending the room into a country kitchen with all modern cooking conveniences. FW-1B.



ABERDEEN ANGUS: An Aberdeen Angus cow, part of the McKenna family's suckler herd grazing on their small holding near the Owenkillew, a river which has a substantial protected population of freshwater pearl mussels. FW-1Q.

sites of historical interest in the area from stone circles to ancient 'fort' settlements, but another big attraction for tourists is the Davagh Forest mountain bike trail. Isabella gave me a guided tour of the cottage, telling me about her welcome to visitors and the pride she takes with the cottage. I finished my visit with the McKenna family by enjoying even more hospitality at their home across the river glen where I met two of Isabella and Eugene's sons. It was a visit I will long remember and a beautiful place I won't forget.

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