

# A FOUR-STAR SUCCESS STORY

Following our recent features on our two village inns, we turn to another Tosside success story - this time about a Tosside farming family which has diversified into tourism.

The Wilson family has lived at Lower Gill Farm for more than 50 years, when John 'Jack' Wilson bought it after suffering heavy losses on his sheep farm on the slopes of Pen-y-Ghent in the legendary snow of 1947. The farm was passed down to Jack's son, Jeff and his wife Tricia, and like many farming families they found themselves wondering whether to expand, sell up or diversify. They also faced a problem with their farmhouse, where one wall was threatening to fall down.



An example of the excellent quality guest accommodation.

They decided to try for permission to move into a redundant barn next door, while rebuilding work took place. Their architect suggested that the barn was big enough for two dwellings, and permission might be more forthcoming if they requested permission for one to be a holiday cottage - and a business was born.

The milk quota was sold to finance the holiday cottage, and for Jeff and Tricia and their family it was the start of much hard work and organization, resulting in a very successful holiday home - Primrose Cottage.

The next step was to join the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and John Welbank of the Bowland Initiative group came on board to advise on hedgerow restoration, two wildlife ponds, a wildlife corridor right through the farm and a permissive footpath following the beck, and taking in an ancient woodland.

He also helped to work out a plan to refurbish the crumbling farmhouse to make a second holiday cottage - a large project to accommodate 10 people in five bedrooms, three bathrooms,



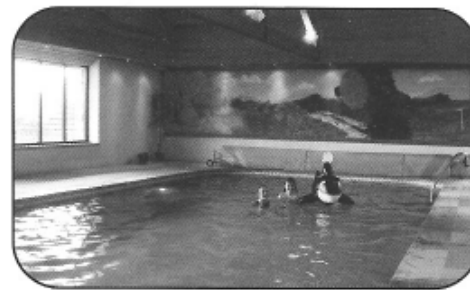
kitchen and lounge. It achieved over 40 bookings in its first year.

As Lower Gill attracted more people, architect David Newton came up with plans to turn the other redundant farm buildings into three more cottages to sleep 12, 6 and 4 people, and a home for Jeff and Tricia's daughter and son-in-law. The other partners in the business, Paul their son and his wife, Lesley also live on the farm in a barn they converted when they married. A leisure centre was built on the site of the old tractor shed, and includes swimming pool, games room, snooker lounge and tennis court. The Rural Enterprise Scheme assisted with the leisure centre, and all work is now complete. The Wilsons can accommodate 37 people.

Said Tricia; "At the start, we didn't

realize we had so much to offer on our farm. We had taken it for granted for so long. Now we enjoy meeting so many people, and seeing their excitement when they tell us they have seen a heron in the brook, a deer, or wild flowers. It's opened our eyes again."

It has also opened the eyes of the English Tourist Board which has awarded four-star status to the holiday homes. Further plans to enhance the outdoor facilities are in the pipeline. And locals are delighted to have such a well-equipped facility in the village when they are looking for somewhere for visiting friends to stay. Villagers are also welcome to use the sports facilities and swimming pool through an annual membership scheme.



The swimming pool is a major asset to the development and popular with guests and local folk. Right: The innovative solar panels which heat the pool.

**The Auction of Promises was a great success with over £2,000 raised. After expenses, cheques for £650 each were presented to Yorkshire Air Ambulance, Ribbles Valley Crossroads & the Community Hall. Thanks to everyone.**

